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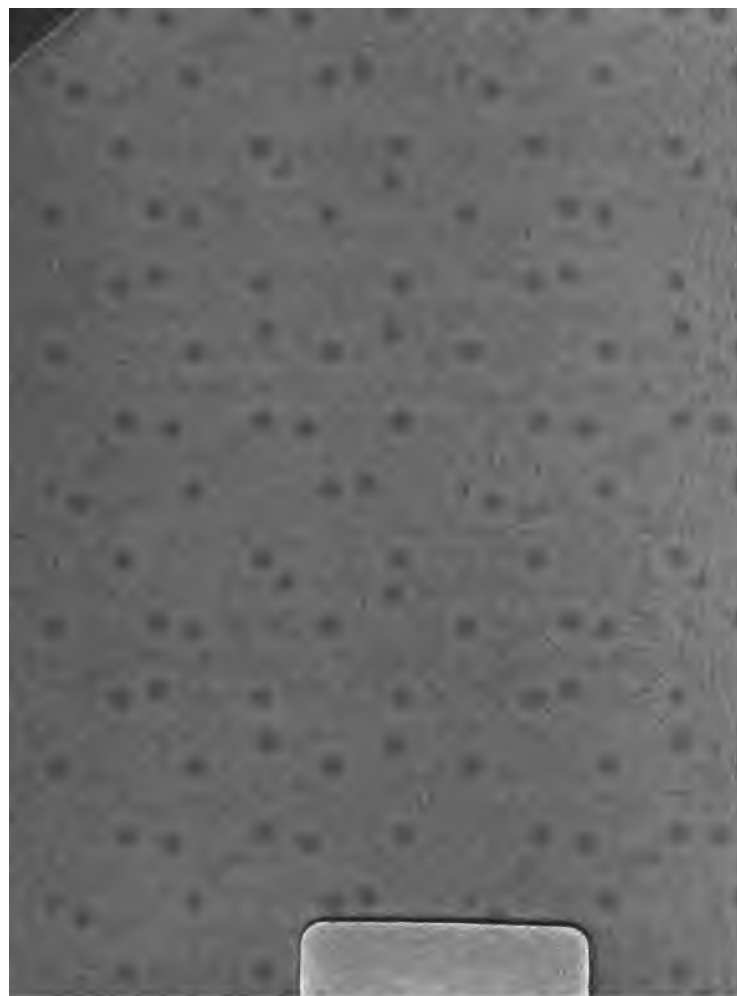


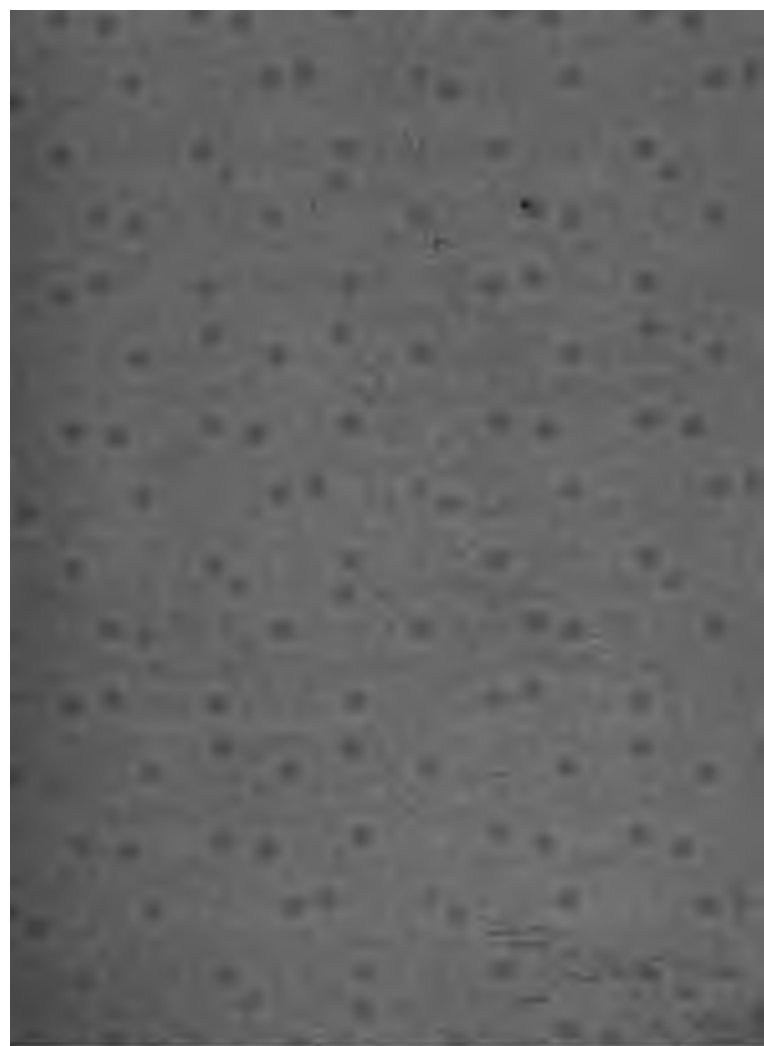
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A Matter
of Taste.

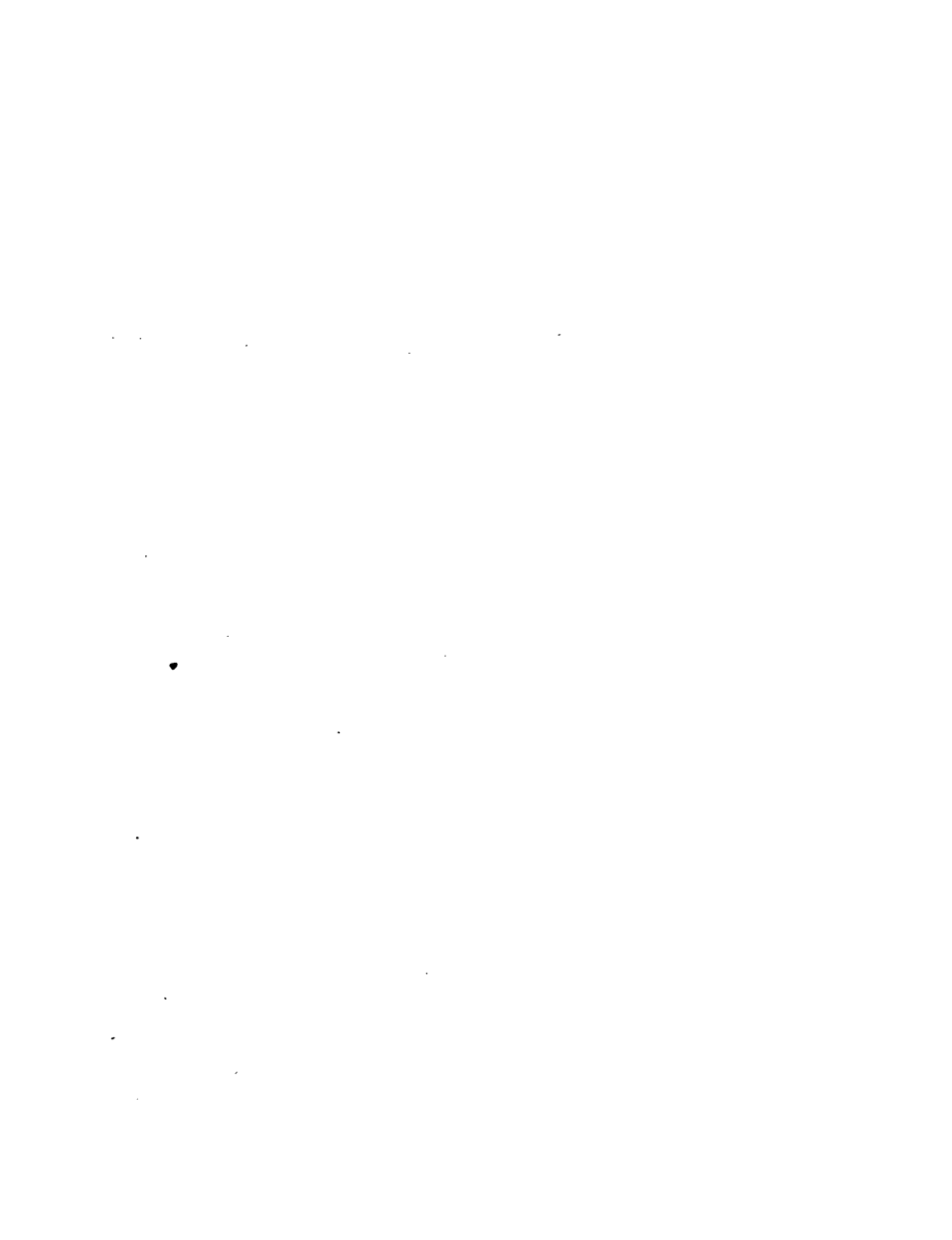


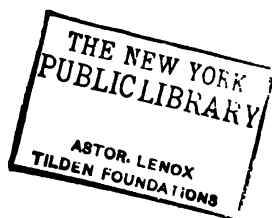
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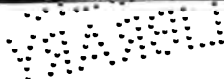








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A Matter of Taste

A Novel

BY GEORGE H. PICARD

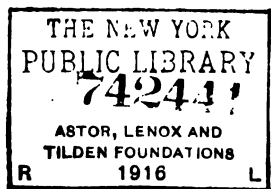
*"Three faculties enter into that complex faculty that is called
Taste,—imagination, sentiment, reason."*

M. COUSIN.

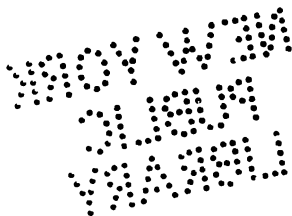


New York
White, Stokes, & Allen
1884

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A Matter of Taste.

At the close of a sultry day a merry party sat upon a prayer-rug spread out upon the steps of a great white house. It was in a mid-land city of phenomenal growth where everything is constructed upon a grand scale. On one side, a wonderful park is laid out along the brink of a blue, inland sea ; the ambitious dreams of young architects are everywhere realized in piles of chiseled stone, and the freshly laid asphalt makes the wide avenue like a bit of Paris transplanted here—and suffering no great loss from the operation.

The rug was rather too cleverly constructed

never used
31 Jan. 1916

for the patient toilers of Agra, but its vivid intricacy was a great credit to Philadelphia—where it was doubtless woven.

A very large woman, with a face as fair, and skin as soft and roseate as a beautiful infant's, was saying with mock earnestness,—in a voice pitched too high for ultra refinement,—

“Yes, my friends, that is precisely what I will do if—I am ever left alone. I will gather together my chattels into as small a space as I can manage to put them, and at once begin a series of wanderings such as has never before been attempted by any woman,—at least by any American woman. Imagine me camped out among the picture-galleries of Europe! I fairly revel in the idea!” And the fair woman's blue eyes rolled upward in a very good imitation of childish ecstasy.

“Pardon me, Alicia,” lazily observed the

gentleman beside her,—a slightly bald and singularly deliberate young person who already began to show signs of an aggressive corpulency,—“are not your plans a trifle exclusive of the Judge?”

Mrs. Alicia Talcote's soft face resolved itself into countless merry dimples, which made it very pleasant to look upon, as she laughingly replied to the sober badinage,—“Don't you think the Judge's present robustness sufficient to clear me of any suspicion of treason? When I look upon him, my dream fades into nothing. I shall view it in the light of a remote possibility.”

The somewhat dignified young gentleman did not continue his well-bred raillery. His large gray eyes were fixed with careful attention upon a smoke-ring of great perfection which had just escaped from the skilled lips of the Judge—over whose massiveness there

certainly hung no appearance of any immediate pathological change.

"Nevertheless, it is very lovely," sighed a young girl, who had been attentively quiet for a long time, "lovely even to dream it."

"Merciful goodness, Mary!" exclaimed Alicia, with a pretty start. "How dreadfully serious you seem!"

Then they relapsed into a slightly uncomfortable silence.

Presently Alicia rose with a graceful flurry that set her many ruffles into a little whirl, and, with a charming irrelevancy, declared that she must at once descend to the kitchen to watch the progress of a wonderful new dish which she had recently invented.

"It's a brilliant thing!" she exclaimed, as she was going away. "Judge, you may prepare your palate for a new tickle. I mean to astonish you all. It's an *olla podrida*."

"I wonder where on earth she found the recipe!" laughed the Judge, admiringly.

"In Don Quixote—or possibly in Gil Blas," suggested the sober gentleman, without the faintest notion of a smile upon his face.

The tall young girl gave him a quick look out of her honest brown eyes, as if she had discovered in his words an incipient treachery toward Alicia, which—because she was not present to defend herself,—Friendship compelled her to resent, at least to the extent of the look.

I.

In The Maderaner Thal.

Nor quite a year afterward—a few weeks earlier in the season—two ladies, both young, sat in the little *salle-à-manger* of the *Hôtel Etoile d'Or* at Amsteg. One of them—a pretty little woman—made herself very busy over some sort of needle-work, every now and then taking up a stitch with the greatest precision. The other—a tall young girl—sat with her long white hands idly resting upon the shining oaken table. The room was as spotless as the one public room of a well-kept Swiss inn always is ; the floor was like an unbroken cake of clear wax ; a light wood Zürich piano stood across a corner ; a set of

neatly carved book-shelves, an ingenious advertising card and a photographic view of the Righi Culm hung upon the walls ; and an immense wood-burning stove still exhausted space to an extent which the already advanced season did not at all warrant.

All the doors and windows were thrown wide open, and the delightful freshness of the Oberland filled the room. The lovely cold river gurgled along within a dozen yards of the tiny back garden, where, in a small and brilliantly-painted pavilion, a middle-aged gentleman sat smoking a long-stemmed native pipe. Two healthy looking children—both boys—ran along the water's edge, trying to attract the smoker's notice, with many noisy feints of throwing themselves into the stream. Across the roughly-paved little street stood the rival and more ambitious hostlery of the Hôtel Bellevue, whose portly landlord has

been courier to the most distinguished families of two Continents. A little farther beyond, the matchless Thal begins, and so does the wonderful post-road which leads on up to Hospenthal and the St. Gotthard.

Within doors, a somewhat listless conversation was going on.

"I am sorry, Mary," the elder lady was saying, "that you don't care for London."

"But I do like it, Fanny. I like it very much indeed."

"Oh, I know, dear. In a sort of dutiful, historical way, I fancy." And she gave her thread a vigorous pull, while the young woman stole a look at her with sober brown eyes twinkling with quiet amusement.

"Now, Mary," presently resumed the sprightly Mrs. Fanny, who was her sister-in-law and an Englishwoman, "I have you entirely alone for a few minutes—completely

at my mercy. I mean to put you through a chapter in the American Catechism. Now dear, tell me all about how you live in Hartford. Are there parishes, hospitals, and——swimming-baths ? ”

“ Yes, indeed. And a sort of modified fox-hunting over at Newport,” laughed her companion. “ I am afraid, however, that you would not find living in Hartford the most exciting kind of an existence. Not because the society isn’t what it ought to be—I believe Hartford society is understood to be a vast improvement upon society in general. But it is hardly up to your tastes, dear. Of course there is a lively succession of dinners and teas, and—,” She hesitated, as if she had exhausted the subject.

“ And what else, love ? ” asked Mrs. Fanny, dropping her work and looking up encouragingly.

"Well; there's the Vesuvius Insurance Company," said Mary, with a sudden inspiration.

"I fancy you can't find that a very serious dissipation," observed Mrs Fanny, dryly. "How, now, are the young men of the place?"

"The young men," answered the girl, reflectively, as if the subject had for the first time been brought to her attention, "the young men are so-so."

"But tell me, dear," said her sister-in-law, moving her chair a little nearer, and looking up sharply yet imploringly out of her soft eyes. "Isn't there now, Mary, some one among them all a little less commonplace than the others?"

The young American returned the look with one equally open and far more honest. "It is possible," she replied. "My chances for observation have been limited."

Mrs. Fanny Augustine was a clever woman. Mr. Thomas Augustine—who was sitting outside enveloped in a sort of smoky glory—had long held the opinion that his bachelor life as a barrister of the Middle Temple was the climax of happy independence; but when, at the age of forty years, he had met pretty Fanny Liscomb and married her, he frankly acknowledged himself to have been in error. It was a great love match. There had been opposition from the lady's friends—well-meaning people who said a good deal about a disparity of ages—but her ingenuity had surmounted everything and she had ended by making everybody's happiness—even that of the doubting friends.

Mrs. Augustine was convinced that she had made the discovery that this young American girl—who was her husband's half-sister, the child of their English father's old age, born in a far-away country—was a person as singularly

deep as she was attractive ; so that, on certain occasions, she stood in a sort of lovable awe of her. At this juncture, her acute tact admonished her that her little feminine designs had been penetrated and that her sage young sister-in-law must be led into ambush by some more skilful method. She very sweetly changed her tactics and the subject at the same moment.

“What an awfully pretty gown you are in !” she exclaimed. “How is it that you Americans never wear any thing dowdy ! Both our lads are sadly infatuated over you and your beautiful dresses. The night we stopped at Basle, I overheard them discussing you,—after they had been put to bed. ‘I say Fred,’ inquired Harold, quite earnestly, ‘whom do you mean to marry ?’ ‘Aunt Mary,’ said the other sleepily, ‘she wears such awfully swell gowns.’ ‘But I want her for myself,’ asserted

Fred, rather testily. 'She's far too clever for you, Harold. She can spin off Latin and Greek paradigms like fun--backwards too. I fancy you wouldn't like that.' 'Yes, I rather like it,' insisted Harold, dreamily. 'It's very stupid of you,' whimpered the other rogue, in a most aggrieved tone. Then Harold began to fret, and I actually had to go in and settle the affair. Upon my word, dear, I hardly expect you to work such havoc in the too susceptible hearts of my young people."

Mary Augustine's face grew beautiful as she listened to her bright-eyed sister-in-law's spirited recital. "Bless their dear hearts," she said. "There is something tangible in an affection of that nature. It isn't at all surprising that my dresses are pretty—they ought to be. Poor mamma devoted herself to their creation with an ardor worthy of a better cause, and I had the benefit of Alicia's won-

derful talent, also. Dear Alicia ! Fanny, I am very impatient to have you know her."

"I wonder what she is like," mused Fanny. "She must be a marvellous person, indeed, since the mere mention of her name brings out more enthusiasm in you than a whole day spent in Oxford Street ever evoked. And yet, I fancy she can't exactly be a person of your sort. Isn't she now, dear, a little—ah—American-like you know?"

At this Miss Augustine laughed outright. "Yes, Fanny," she said, "that describes her perfectly. She is decidedly American—and so am I, for that matter."

"Oh, I know. But really, dear,—I don't mean to flatter you,—that's so stupid—but, do you know, I don't find you so awfully American? I can see far more of it in Tom, although he has been out of the country since he was a young lad."

"Thank you, Fanny. How gratified mamma would be if she could hear you say so. Mamma is so thoroughly a believer in what she calls the 'English idea'—whatever it is."

Mrs. Fanny bridled up a bit, as if she detected a slightly gamish disposition in her bright American relative.

"How old is she?" she asked, suddenly returning to the main subject.

"Alicia? I hav'n't the remotest idea. Alicia is far too pretty and free from angles to ever grow very old; indeed, I think she is growing younger every year. She is really a great, smooth, happy girl-baby. She is the most strikingly unconventional creature. The most remarkable thing about her is a kind of clairvoyancy, which enables her to know everything you most wish for—almost before you begin to wish for it. Then she sets about, in the most delicate way, to procure

your happiness—and she rarely fails. There is nothing at all ordinary about her. When envious people undertake to say spiteful things about her, they are always compelled, sooner or later, to attack her figure—for want of a more vulnerable point. You are sure to like her, Fanny."

"She is doubtless a superior person ; but I fancy I could not get on with her," asserted Mrs. Fanny, with an air of foresight.

"I don't fear anything for Alicia. She will carry even your stony heart by storm. I know only one person who isn't entirely devoted to her, and I hav'n't much faith in the genuineness of that perversion."

"And who is she, pray ?" †

Mary was a little amused at this random curiosity. "*He* is Mr. John Forester, Judge Talcote's bosom friend and *fidus Achates*," she explained. "Mr. Forester declares that

the Judge is a martyr to domestic superficialness. Alicia, not to be outdone, pronounces her husband to be a martyr to his friends—and more especially to Mr. Forester. She says that the most painful thing she has to endure is to see her husband so completely under the fascination of her placid, exasperating enemy. ‘I don’t see what they have in common,’ she is accustomed to say; ‘they have no conversation; but they seem to think it enough to sit speechless in each other’s presence hour after hour, and, when at last they part, they seem perfectly charmed one with the other.’ It is a very pretty quarrel. I suspect the gentleman of entertaining a secret admiration for his foe. He is a great friend of mamma’s and the boys’.”


“And how do you regard him, my dear?” asked Fanny, very softly and slyly.

"He is altogether irreproachable," replied Mary. "I don't remember telling you that I learned from the letter I had in Lucerne, that he had concluded—at the last moment it seems—to join Alicia's party. I suppose we shall see a good deal of them in Italy."

"I hope so," said Fanny. And then she very innocently added, "I imagine he couldn't get on without the Judge's society."

The young American girl leaned over and gently stroked the English-woman's soft, brown hair. There was a look in her eyes that told Mrs. Fanny as plainly as words, that she had met defeat. "Now, Fanny," said she, "don't go and get any ideas into your pretty head."

"Nothing to be feared in that direction," interposed the jolly barrister, who had apparently overheard the caution as he was coming in.



"How natural of you, Tom, to come in at the very last and ruin everything!" exclaimed his wife in affectionate wrath.

They sat there a good while. There was a great deal of conversation, all very sprightly and friendly. At last Mary arose and went out and joined the boys by the river-side.

"What do you think of her now?" asked her brother, as soon as she had left the room.

"She is a charming creature," replied his wife. "She isn't the least like you, dear; I dare say she resembles her mother."

"Very likely," assented the fond husband. "I don't know the mother."

"What a comfort it is to have her with us," continued Fanny. "I should have been frightfully bored without her."

"Reflect upon my condition, love, under similar circumstances," he retorted.

"Do you know, Tom, I was just on the

point of making a discovery when you came in upon us."

"Yes?"

"There is a gentleman in the plot."

"Yes?"

"Mamma Arnold and the young Arnolds are very fond of him."

"I say!"

"He is not Alicia's friend, although he has joined her party."


"What a go!"

"I imagine we shall see a good deal of Mr. John Forester in Italy."

"And you conclude?"

"I hav'n't exactly arrived at a conclusion yet."

"I think I can assist you. I need not assure you that it will afford me the greatest comfort to do what I can for you." And he took a letter from his waistcoat pocket and



handed it to her with his very best bow. She saw at a glance that it was from Hartford and that Mrs. Arnold, Mary's mother, had written it. It had been forwarded from Lucerne and had overtaken them that very morning,—in fact the landlady, who was post-mistress also, had delivered it with her own hands, to Mr. Augustine as he sat in the pavilion.

Mrs. Arnold was an excellent letter-writer, and there were a good many interesting things in her letter. "We have finally made up our minds—" so she wrote—"to send Hilliard abroad for a year, under the protection of our friend Mr. John Forester. We do not intend that the boy shall be a care to you or to Mary; pray do not undertake the slightest responsibility,—we can rely upon Mr. F., who is a very old friend of ours. He has been wholly devoted to your sister since her earliest childhood, and it is the most unaccountable

thing in the world that she has refused to marry him. (I betray no confidence in telling you of this, for Mary has never mentioned a word of it to me. I had it direct from the gentleman himself.)”

Mrs. Augustine read the letter from beginning to end and handed it back to her husband with a little sigh.

“Does it in any way affect your conclusion,—modify it, or otherwise?” he asked, with much gravity.

“Yes, it does. It cuts everything off short. I call it a regular end of the beginning!” declared Fanny, with an air of genuine disappointment.

“I really can’t say,” drawled the barrister. “But I fancy it is hardly that.”

“I am quite incapable of understanding what sort of a life it is that those Hartford people of yours lead,” said Fanny, a little irritably.

"It's a rum one beyond a doubt," opined the barrister.

Now, strange to say, just at this very moment, Mary and the boys were upon precisely the same subject—the problem of How they live in Hartford. The young Augustines were possessed of the most shadowy notions respecting the social features of the country which had produced their interesting aunt. Mr. Frederick—who, as preparatory to the study of English Literature, had been permitted to digest a volume once written by the justly celebrated Mr. Cooper,—already esteemed himself quite an authority upon American matters.

"Hartford must be full of savages," he was saying, with all the wisdom of a very young student. "It's so far away from New York."

"Yes," admitted his aunt, with undisturbed

gravity. "There are a good many savages there."

"Don't they take scalps with their sharp battle-axes? Don't they offer to steal your pretty gowns?" demanded Harold, breathlessly.

"No, dear. They have given up the tomahawk—it was hardly sharp enough for them; and they are quite satisfied with their own paint and feathers."

"She's guying you, Hal," warned wiser Frederick.

But literal Harold had started off in hot pursuit of a flying lizard. Superior Fred then continued his series of questions, to which his aunt good-naturedly returned the fullest information in her power. Some of her answers must have been sufficiently thrilling—to judge from the incredulous exclamations which now and then escaped from her interested listener's lips.

At the end of half an hour, Mr. Augustine called them in to dinner with a ludicrous *jodel*,—something like the wailing of an asthmatic trumpet. *Table d' hote* followed,—at least what is termed *table d' hote* in Swiss inns, where families dine alone, and no sign of any living host is apparent. The soup was served at a small side-table by a bustling little landlady, who had a very well-developed moustache, and distributed by her bustling daughters, dark girls, with braided hair and incipient moustaches. The wooden salad-bowl was carved in *Marguerites*, and the spoon and fork, in the *Edelweiss* flower. The dessert was of stewed prunes and Albert biscuit sent by express from London.

The Augustines were quite undisturbed in this loveliest of Swiss valleys, whose olive-skinned people are already a hint of the Italy just over the mountain-side. They stored up

the memories of long, wearily happy climbs up the wild Bristenstock begun in enthusiasm and ended in surfeit. Upon one ambitious excursion they even reached the Damen Gletcher when the bristling crags were clear.

One day when a late spring snow-storm had hung all the pine trees of the Maderaner with a ghostly fringe, they ascended to Andermatt, from whence they were spirited by a sudden transformation into the yellow fields and mulberry-groves of Tuscany.

II.

The American Foundation.

MRS. ALICIA TALCOTE was "completely gone" over Venice—as she at once confessed to her friends. It was not that she had not suffered—in common with other distinguished travelers—some disappointment, bitter disappointment she felt it to be ; but on the whole she professed herself to be even "more than satisfied."

As a fair beginning of an exceedingly interesting subject, it is only necessary to state that Mrs. Talcote was a woman who was possessed of a large amount of what is termed


capability—by the somewhat nervous society of the noisy midland city in which she lived. That this opinion was not merely the verdict obtained by a remarkably expansive popularity could be shown in many ways. The decoration and arrangement of the interior of her perfectly new house were indisputable evidence of the truth of it. Here everything meant something, was readily explainable—at least by Mrs. Talcote herself. Things were not so greatly modified by conventionalities as to be no longer recognizable, or as she was accustomed to felicitously observe, “Nothing had been sacrificed to mere vulgar Utility or enshrined in Formalism.” As an adjunct to her perfect freedom in matters of taste, there was, fortunately, great wealth,—so that she felt herself to be practically limitless. She was a tireless worker. She made it an unbroken rule to examine every English-written novel

as soon as it was printed, and all the great publishers had standing orders to keep her supplied. "In this manner," she once remarked, "I now and then discover a genius."

Although she had no technical knowledge of music, she had an exceedingly definite idea of what music should be, and she had long been an indefatigable collector of standard editions.


Her home was a sort of Mecca for musicians of every degree, and she was the happy possessor of the most complete musical library in her country.

She modestly professed to have had great experience in religious matters and manifested a decided propensity for polemics. She had run the whole length of the theological gauntlet—so she declared—between the Evangelical earnestness of early youth and the more mature relaxation of what is known as Liberal-



ism. Just before embarking, she had confided to an intimate friend—himself a sort of mystic—that she had discovered great merit in an obscure philosophy deemed in some respects, to be a revival of the mysticism once presided over by Isis—and, perhaps, Osiris. Next to her religion—the peculiarity of which did not in the least militate against the moral attractiveness of her character,—she esteemed the promotion of her husband's physical comfort to be most essential.

Judge Talcote, who was a great corporation lawyer, had been fortunate enough to have had much wealth thrust upon him in the shape of huge retainers for services which he had not yet been called upon to perform. He had hitherto been conspicuous only by reason of his commanding robustness and the almost unbroken silence under which he concealed his conversational powers. He was



entirely a self-made man, having accumulated both fame and fortune in ample quantities—not indeed by any concentration of effort on his part, but without the interested connivance of others. He was suspected—by his friends and others—of entertaining as much genuine admiration for his wife as she openly professed to feel for him. So great a confidence had he in her analytical and determining powers, that he had always unhesitatingly followed her through the mazes of her religious labyrinth—but always at a respectful distance.

The Talcotes established themselves in a Byzantine structure, with a pure white façade more imposing even than that of their recently-constructed midland home. It had just been purchased from the “confiscating Piedmontese” by a Hebrew banker of Hanover, who was of a speculative turn, and it


of half-sob, "to see you,—to see something American again!"

It was not at all like Alicia to be so demonstrative. She ordinarily held mankind at arm's length, and Mary had never before seen her so agitated. She at once made up her mind that her friend must have imbibed some of the sentiment of the locality.

"Why, Alicia!" she exclaimed, "I didn't know there was any dearth of that article,—even here."


"There isn't," admitted Mrs. Talcote, with a sudden resumption of her dignity; "But I would advise you not to expect too much of it. The genuine article isn't at all common—especially here."

Then Mary presented her brother and his family, who had been all the time gazing upon this ponderous apparition with the choicest of well-bred amazement.



"I'm going to take Mary straight home with me," she declared. And with the overwhelming hospitality, which, although it lacks delicacy, is believed to be an intrinsic element in the composition of a very large person, she immediately added : " I will take all of you, gladly."

The sadly-perplexed Augustines received her comprehensive proposition with looks in which alarm and amusement were about equally present. Finally the barrister recovered himself sufficiently to assure her that he could not disappoint the Blumenbergs, of whom he had already taken an *appartement*. " I don't mind giving you my sister for a day," he politely added. " You are such old friends, and I dare say Mary is a little anxious to see her young brother. Are Mr. Forester and Hilliard Arnold near you ?"



"They have gone back to Arona," laughed Alicia. "There was something about the lake that Hilliard missed seeing. When they return, I do not expect them to settle themselves very near us. Mr. Forester does not approve of my methods."

Mrs. Talcote's far too splendid gondola was waiting at the foot of the broad water-steps. Its glossy newness brought the faded shabbiness of the attendant fleet into rather painful contrast. The two ladies entered it, and the poetically-attired boatmen pushed off with a vigor quite unknown to ordinary gondoliers. The hotel boats and the funereal-looking vehicle of the Blumenbergs were speedily distanced, and then began that always mysterious dodging in and out, across corners and under arches, so novel and bewildering to him who sees Venice for the first time. Mary sat speechless upon her velvet cushion,

with Alicia gazing upon her as attentively as if she feared some atom of this strong first impression might escape her wakeful observation.

After a good while, Alicia asked, very gently: "Does it remind you of anything, dear?"

"I think it reminds me of almost everything," replied Mary, very slowly.

"For my part, I was just then thinking of Catherine Cornaro," confessed Mrs. Talcote. "What a sensation she must have made sailing up these canals just as we are doing now! And just then, I remembered something that worries me. The Judge has taken to brandy-and-water. I know John Forester suggested it."

Mary did not say a word. It is altogether likely that the unhappy Cypriote's name had not been much discussed in Hartford, and she

was wholly unprepared to discuss the other enormity.

“The most aggravating difficulty in Venice,” continued Alicia, as if she had not spoken until now, “is to keep in the same mind about anything for five minutes at a time. Of course, a few things are certain enough. For instance, this water is always remarkably blue. But everything changes about so. A thing may be beautiful in the morning, passable at noon and unendurable at night. The moon, dear, makes a far different thing out of these anchored marbles than they seem to be in the glaring sunshine, and when it rains it is simply abominable ! I hardly know what to think of the architecture. The critics who find most fault with St. Mark’s seem to love it best after all. The Ruskin set, and the poet-painters, are forever complaining and praising in the same breath.

Now, if I were left entirely to myself, I should say, that, although mankind has been rather generous to provide for the comfort and honor of all the apostles, St. Mark is certainly the best housed."

"And the picture-makers—Titian and the others? Is there any disappointment there?" demanded Mary, breathlessly.

"Really, dear, I can't undertake the responsibility," declared Alicia, holding up her plump hands in dismay. "I must refer you to Dr. Ferro."

Mary began to wonder why it was that Mrs. Talcote declined to say anything about Art. Was Venetian Art so far beyond her? Was anything so far beyond Alicia as to compel her silence respecting it? And yet, Mrs. Talcote had always been greatly enamored of Art and was herself no mean painter. Mary even now remembered, with a good deal of

indignation, that certain works of her friend had been pronounced by John Forester to be "the most magnificently framed pictures in America."

"Who is Dr. Ferro?" she asked, "Is he anybody like Ruskin?"

"He's an—an Italian," replied Alicia, rather indefinitely. "He's a Cavaliere and a graduate of the University of Padova: that's a great thing for an Italian—or anybody."

"I suppose it is," said Mary, absently.

"I know such quantities of nice people here," Alicia went on, "not Italians altogether, but all sorts, except—Americans. My experience with my countrymen abroad has not been at all profitable, so far. I have consoled myself with a lot of foreigners—artists and literary people, and a good many noblemen."

All further discussion of the subject was

made impracticable by the sudden stoppage of the gondola at the water-gate of the Palazzo Americani—as the witty canal-men had already begun to distinguish the mediæval pile in which Alicia had begun her reign. They left the gondola and passed through a wide, arched doorway, into a long hall, with low stone benches ranged along both sides of it, and an avenue of the evergreen *sempre vivre*, set in immense green tubs, along its whole length.

“This floor seems to be in an excellent state of preservation,” remarked the conscientiously observing young American.

“It’s a sort of restoration,” explained Alicia. “It was finished only the other day by a clever Venetian, who has very nearly discovered the lost secrets of the old mosaic-workers.”

“He’s a desperately cruel thorn in the side of the ‘Sage of Denmark Hill,’” said the Judge, who had joined them.



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III.

At Alicia's Court.

ALICIA'S Court,—upon which Mr. John Forster had bestowed the high-sounding title of “the American Foundation”—was not invested with the simplicity which is popularly supposed to clothe republican institutions—both at home and abroad. A certain amount of state was necessary to Mrs. Talcote's proper amplification. She did not complain—as many another American woman must have done,—that there was a surplus of space in the great *salons* of the Palazzo Americani. She found them empty indeed, yet nothing disheartened, she proceeded without delay to

fill them, at first with everything she could gather together out of the scanty treasures remaining to the plundered Venetians, and then,—since there yet was left an abundance of room,—with people, of whom she found a sufficient number to carry out her purpose.

There speedily arose a great deal of emulation among the native artificers—especially among those whose happy handicraft it is to produce antiquities at a few hours notice. The news of the great lady's project spread out among all the islands in the lagoons, and there was an actual revival of trade. One lucky glass-blowing beggar of Murano was likely to make his fortune from the accidental discovery of a method of cracking his wares in such an artistic manner that they at once took on mediæval graces.

The British Augustines had from the

first found themselves in a strange and not wholly comfortable position. If they could not approve of Alicia as a whole, they were at least a good deal affected by her magnificence. Tom Augustine, who, to borrow his own parlance, "had seen a bit of the world," was for once thrown into the way of a decided novelty. At certain moments, indeed, he felt in doubt as to how far the strange intimacy between his American sister and this intensely radical countrywoman of hers should be encouraged. As for Mrs. Fanny, she was from the outset quite emphatic in her disapprobation; yet she confessed—on more than one occasion—that she had never before dreamed of such ingenuous hospitality, nor feasted her observing eyes upon such exquisite toilettes as Alicia's talent evolved.

"Of course it's outlandish," she had declared to her husband, when they were talk-


ing it over for at least the hundredth time, "but it isn't——"

"So deucedly bad," said her husband, coming to the rescue.

"Thomas!" She raised her small hand with a warning gesture. "Be careful! It's a clear case of infatuation on your part."

Then the subject was postponed until the next time.

Mrs. Talcote, on her part, pronounced herself to be thoroughly in love with the sparkling little Englishwoman, and she set about a systematic proffer of civilities which were, from their very magnitude, sufficient to put the other upon her guard. "I like your sister-in-law immensely," she informed Mary. "There's such a total lack of anything like sham about her. Englishwomen are vastly our superiors in conversation; there's nothing prudish or artificial in what they say. I often



wish I could talk as plainly as I feel like doing. Imagine the consternation I should create by adopting English perspicuity in my speech! I should be thought vulgar. I believe that you Hartford people affect those things, don't you? But, Mary, did you ever in your life see such a figure as she cuts in those queer, mannish-looking clothes? After all, Englishwomen talk prettily; but they hav'n't an inkling into style."

With the young Augustines Alicia had not fared at all badly. Their insular reticence was not proof against her American lavishness, and they had soon given up their hearts to her in unconditional surrender—O happy fashion of childhood! She made much of them and took them about with her in her fanciful gondola.

In the course of time, Mr. John Forester and his young charge, having repaired the

omission at Arona, came back to Venice and went into lodgings at a *pension*, near the Blumenberg's,—where the Augustines were established.

Forester first saw the Augustines at Alicia's house, where a grand reception was being given on the very evening of his arrival. He stood beside the Judge at the farther end of the long, *brilliantly-lighted salon* and silently watched the *bizarre* company as it came in singly and in groups. There was a look of quiet enjoyment in his eyes—"soulless gray eyes with no depths in them," Alicia had once described them. The Judge was in a condition of what might be aptly defined as silent hilarity. Mrs. Talcote, a mass of diaphanous finery, floated serenely about in the midst of the most cosmopolitan assemblage to be obtained—even in Venice.

It was some time before Forester discovered-

Mary Augustine. When he did see her, she was a long way off and only visible now and then when the crowd of moving curiosities left a break in its ranks. She was seated in a low chair, and a tall and very thin gentleman, who wore an eye-glass, stood close beside her. They seemed to be engaged in quite a spirited conversation and were apparently on very good terms with each other. Forester could see that the man was very dark and Italian, and that he was doubtless in feeble health, for he was leaning upon the back of the chair, and his sober face was sallow—even for a Venetian.

"Is'n't this rich, John?" chuckled the Judge, for once relaxing his habitual taciturnity.

"Decidedly," replied Forester, laconically.

"Seen anything rarer in your day?"

"Hardly."

After this outburst neither one of them spoke a word for at least twenty minutes.

Then it was again the Judge who exclaimed, anxiously : " Forester what kind of an institution is this coming down upon us ? "

" It looks like Madame bearing off a captured Turk," replied his friend.

And so it proved to be. Alicia had taken possession of a Turkish officer, a handsome fellow in trousers, lavishly embroidered vest and real fez, whom she was dying—so she said—to present to the Judge, and whom, a moment later, she did present as Solyman Pasha.

" So kind of you, Pasha," she murmured, " and so fortunate for me. The Judge has been extremely anxious to obtain correct information concerning the resources of your delightful country."

She chose to be a little startled at the sight



of her ancient enemy. "Who could have expected you, of all creatures, to turn up!" she cried. "Somebody told me you had returned to America."

He did not attempt a reply, for she had taken his arm and moved off with him. "Come right away with me and pay your respects to Mary Augustine," she said. "You certainly do show the most remarkable indifference to the sweet girl."

Mary Augustine was still talking to the spare gentleman—or rather listening to his talk. She had risen from her seat, and Forester noticed that her quiet face was lighted up with a rare brightness, which made it beautiful.

"Such friends as those two have become!" whispered Alicia, as they came close up to them without being observed. "She has known him only a few weeks."

"Whom?" asked Forester, raising his light eyebrows very slightly indeed.

"The Cavaliere Ferro."

"He looks like a Hebrew choir-master I know."

"He's a physician," said Alicia, indignantly, "and a very good one, I'm told. I think him one of the handsomest men I ever saw."

An object so palpable and so radiant as Mrs. Talcote could not long remain undiscovered even under the temporary oblivion which is brought about by the most charming conversation in the world. She introduced the gentlemen with that special aptitude for the ceremony which had made her envied at home, and which was beginning to be talked of abroad. Mary held out her hand to Forester, as if she regarded him as a good friend whom she had not seen for a day or so—perhaps a


fortnight. Alicia very soon—almost too soon for perfect ingenuousness—invited the Italian to accompany her on some social mission which was likely to require their united diplomacy.

He looked the American intruder over from head to foot with well-bred Italian impertinence, bowed low, and, in the most fluent English, begged Madame to command him.

For the first moment, these two old acquaintances did not speak; they were too much amused at Alicia's bare-faced generalship to trust themselves to say anything.

"We seem to be constantly adding something to the load of obligation we have so long borne," began Mary. "This last matter of bringing Hilliard over, makes our debt beyond all hope of settlement, I fear."

"I have undertaken it with my eyes open," said Forester. "It is a sort of work of supererogation. Think of the merit I am storing up



with Mrs. Arnold ! I suppose I shall sometime begin to avail myself of it."

She gave him a quick look out of her already illuminated eyes.

" I should scarcely have suspected you of so much casuistry," she said.

" I should think you must be quite prepared for any amount of it. You know it is believed in America that this is the climate where such things flourish well and attain great perfection."

" I think," said Mary, very slowly and firmly, " that like many another popular belief, it is founded upon a fiction. I think it is a mistake."

" What is your friend's opinion in the matter ?—I mean the Cavaliere," he asked, putting a distinctness into the words of which he was a little ashamed.

With a slightly surprised look in which



there was not the faintest suspicion of consciousness, Mary replied, simply enough: "I have not asked it."

Then they fell into a more or less embarrassed silence, during which, Forester seemed to be engaged in taking in the preposterous arrangement of the *salon*.

Mary restored the conversation by gently observing: "I did not know, Mr. Forester, that you were thinking of coming abroad."

He smiled, a little grimly. "I don't suppose that even Mrs. Talcote expected to have her dream become reality so speedily. She evidently concluded not to put off her journey until the Judge—had gone upon his longer one."

"When I think of Alicia," she declared, with indignation in her voice, "your remark seems little better than—sacrilege."

He paid no attention to her loyal outburst.

"I may have had a very good reason for coming when I did," he went on.

"I cannot doubt it,—especially when I remember how practical you are."

"Perhaps I felt it to be my duty to see that no harm comes to Hilliard."


"That reminds me of our obligation, again."

"Perhaps I had the curiosity to see how you would conduct yourself in a foreign country."

"In any case in which I am personally concerned," she said, quickly and very earnestly, "I do not recognize your right."

A pitiful expression, half amusement, half pain, came out in Forester's face. "I did not know the Augustines, and I can't trust Mrs. Talcote," he said, in a tone of dignified humility.

Happily for both of them, the Judge, who



had just turned his back upon the perturbed Mussulman and incontinently run away, joined them. They all went over to the Augustines, who were sitting in a sort of model family group upon a sofa near by. The Judge had taken a great fancy to Mary's English friends and felt very much at home with them, especially with Mrs. Fanny,—who pronounced him the most perfect American she had ever met. They received the newcomer with many expressions of welcome, and Mrs. Augustine made a place for him beside her on the sofa.

“We have heard so much of you, that we really know you,” said she, sweetly.

“I can hardly realize that we are seeing you at all,” laughed the stout barrister, with a hearty shake of the hand. “I can only think of you as still in Hartford.”

“It is difficult to realize anything when one

is sitting in this old palace—where the vine and fig-tree of the now extinct Serpolini once cast their shade,” said Fanny sentimentally.

“Are the Serpolini really extinct?” asked Forester. “I wonder if their ghosts are represented here to-night!”

“They must have been a rum lot,” said Tom Augustine.

“Not more so than this menagerie—hardly as rum,” declared the Judge.

“I hav’n’t seen a person in all Venice who would remind me of what the Serpolini women must have been,—at most, I have seen only one,” asserted Mrs. Fanny.

“Who is that one, Fanny,” asked Mary, who seemed to have developed a sudden interest in the matter.

“Lady Josselyn.”


“I thought so,” said Mary in a tone that indicated a suspension of the interest.

"Josselyn is not Italian—nor even Venetian," suggested Forrester.

"No ; but Lady Teresa is Venetian. Her husband is an Irish peer," explained Mrs. Augustine.

A little later on, Forester made a tour of the imposing rooms which Mrs. Talcote's exuberant fancy had decked out in all the glory of modern affectation. She had hung the smallest *salon* in golden leather and made it a repository of all the treatises which had lately attracted her attention. A huge sofa of the same bright-hued dermal material was drawn into the middle of the room and very likely marked the exact spot where the polemical American lady carried on her mental warfare against the impudent premises and illogical conclusions of those philosophers who disagreed with her.

For once, however, this seat of luxurious




profundity was given over to lighter purposes. A beautiful woman was seated upon it, and she was surrounded by an admiring court of gentlemen—mostly Englishmen. She was very gay and, apparently, a wit, and her face and figure were remarkably like that painter's daughter,—loved by a master-painter—whose beauty has been handed down upon her proud father's canvas, as the noble Santa Barbara of the Church of Santa Maria Formosa.

"Who is the lady—the one to whom the men are so entirely devoted!" Forester asked of the Cavaliere, who was standing close beside him.

"The Lady Josselyn."

"She is very beautiful. Do you know her?"

"Yes; I know her well; she is my sister," replied the Italian, with a keen look at the matter-of-fact individual who seemed to have



made some concession to a passing curiosity. Forester returned the glance **with** another in which there was not so much surprise as a search for confirmation in the Cavaliere's face, in which he certainly found no tell-tale likeness to remind him of the lovely woman who was talking and laughing and gesticulating in a charming manner.

"Your sister seems to be very happy," said he, looking over at the lady, whose state of joyful animation bordered upon hilarity.

"She cannot be that—it is impossible," said the spare Italian, with a painful contraction of his heavy eyebrows.

Forester politely fixed his eyes upon the composite nicety of Salviati's newly laid floor.

"I suppose you cannot yet have heard of it," the Cavaliere went on. "My sister has made an unfortunate marriage, and she is crushed with bitterness. It is all the more

cruel for her because she might have made her happiness—by marrying one of her own countrymen.”


Forester glanced across at the brilliant lady, who at that moment, certainly, betrayed no sign of the sackcloth and ashes in which her brother's words had metaphorically clothed her.

“As a rule,” the Cavaliere continued, with an air of great discrimination, “those Venetians who marry themselves to foreigners cannot be said to have done wisely.”

“Very likely,” said Forester, who felt that he was expected to say something. “I suppose that, in such cases, there is a lack of proper understanding to begin with.”

“There is usually a lack of almost everything,—especially to end with,” rejoined the other, with an unhealthy smile.

Forester did not feel inclined to push the



matter ; so he made no reply. The Cavaliere, who evidently had a taste for developing subjects, waited a moment, as if he expected him to go on, and then began a series of questions, some of them pertinent enough and some of them—perhaps unwittingly—impertinent.

“What is the fellow driving at?” Forester asked himself. He concluded that the Italian might be trying to adapt his conversation to what he regarded as American requirement.

“How do you find Italy?” he finally demanded, tamely enough.

“I have seen very little of it. Of course I like it. I am only human.”

“Yes ; of course that is true. But I am out of patience with it,—and I am not alone in that. We cannot shake ourselves clear from a sentiment which has grown to be a part of our weakened individuality. It interferes with our progress. We do not progress

as other people do. I am greatly interested in America."

"Ah, indeed. You have been over there then?"

"No ; I have not been away from my own country. But I have known many Americans and they interest me far more than the English. To me they seem generic and the English only a species."

"You do not flatter the English," said Forester, laughing.


"Have you been in Hartford?" asked the Cavaliere, suddenly.

"Yes ; I have lived there."

"Perhaps then you will tell me—I am curious to know—whether Miss Augustine may be regarded as a typical Hartford young lady?"

Forester began to suspect that he was being adroitly quizzed.

"Miss Augustine is esteemed a very supe-



rior young lady—even in Hartford,” he replied, rather stiffly.

“I am sure of it,” said the Italian. “I thank you. I can see my sister making signs for me to take you to her. If we do not go to her, she will come to us. She does not hesitate.”

“In such a case, let us go at once,” said Forester, gallantly.

When the Cavaliere spoke again he was presenting Forester to his sister, and the American gentleman was making his courtliest bow before the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.


The Lady Teresa was very gracious to him. With a quick word of command, bewitchingly spoken, she dispossessed one of her young English devotees and put Forester in the vacant place. She talked away to him in the quaintest of English, in which, although she

was not as ready with the idiom as the Cavaliere, there was a grace which more than covered up all lack of fluency. She, also, wished to know whether he was gratified with Italy ; and she seemed particularly anxious to find out whether the Americans that stay at home are as charming as those who travel.

“It must be a heavenly life to be an American,” she sighed. “There is always such a plentitude of money. There is always such an opportunity. That is what we cannot have—the opportunity.”

The Cavaliere had stolen away almost as soon as the words of introduction had been spoken, and the Englishmen, who had no taste for a conversation in which they were likely to cut no figure, one by one followed his example.

“It is not easy to believe that you have had no opportunity,” said Forester, with more



admiration in his voice than he had intended to put there.

“But sir,” she went on eagerly, at the same time letting her fan rest lightly upon the sleeve of his coat, “if, as you say, I once had an opportunity, it is no longer mine!—I have lost it. I must always see the chance I wish for in the possession of another, more fortunate than poor me. Your country-woman Miss Augustine has opportunity—without limit!”

Forester was a good deal perplexed at the curious freedom and sentimentality of her discourse. He took refuge in asking her if she knew the Augustines.


“Yes ; I know them,—at a great distance. They do not come to me. Perhaps my little house is too dull—it is a very hum-drum little house. Yet many people come to it ; but it is not because there is any joy in it. No ; it is rather because they are kind. Can you

tell me why it is that your friends do not oftener come to me?" she asked with bewildering ingenuousness.

"That is entirely beyond my ken," he answered, soberly.

She evidently did not comprehend this reply, for she looked up at him wonderingly and rather beseechingly and waited a moment, as if she expected him to say some qualifying word. As he said nothing else, she again began to speak of the dulness of her house. "It is a very stupid place," she averred, "an extremely unattractive little house. It is quite as silent as Venice is said to be—in the accounts of the travelers, yet, as shabby and poor as it is, I am fond of seeing my friends in it."

"I shall be impatient to see it. I hope to get on rapidly in my acquaintance with you, —and your brother," said Forester.



"As for me," she laughingly declared, "it is a matter simple enough. I am always there. But my brother is never with me; he is too devoted to other things."

"I suppose he is devoted to medicine," Forester hazarded.

Lady Josselyn again looked as if she had failed to understand. "Yes," she finally said, somewhat reflectively, "I suppose the Cavaliere is devoted to medicine; he has been at Padova." She paused a moment, lowered her voice a little and added: "You will not be friends,—you and the Cavaliere."

"Let us hope that you are mistaken," said Forester, cheerfully.

"No. I would rather not hope that," she said.


If Lady Josselyn had intended to throw any light upon the mysterious character of her last remark, she was deprived of the chance,

for Mrs. Talcote,—who had the fashion, so common to large persons, of noiselessly appearing in what might be termed a sort of material spirituality—stood before them.

“Such progress!” she exclaimed, with the massive graciousness, so becoming to her. “Mr. Forester, you have swept the field. Where is the army of pretty gallants which so lately worshipped at this shrine?”

“It is because your *salon* is so large and so magnificent ; they are lost in it,” laughed Lady Teresa.

Thus it was that Forester had no further opportunity to continue his conversation with the beautiful Venetian. Nor did he speak again to Mary Augustine, who went away early with her friends. He saw her, however, as she was being handed into the gondola by the dark Cavaliere, who drew her shawl a little more closely about her shoulders, bowed




low and stood looking after her long after the noisy boat-man's cry of *già è !* had ceased to ring out upon the summer air.

IV.

The Little House beside the Canonry.

THE Lady Teresa lived in a small house—small, at least, by contrast—not far from the Canonry of San Marco. From its upper windows, she might look down upon those comfortable looking gentlemen, the canons, as they passed to and from the Basilica.

Forester soon found his way to it, and it did not take him long to discover that it was neither so shabby nor so dull as its interesting mistress had declared it to be. He also discovered that there were plenty of people that found it a remarkably cheerful little house; for he very infrequently found Lady Josselyn free from visitors. He began to



think that she must be the most certain attraction in Venice. In a moment of rigid self-examination such as even the most virtuous among men are subject to, he honestly admitted to his inner consciousness only, that all the priceless treasures of the Accademia had interested him far less than had the extraordinary perfections of this Venetian lady, who had married an Irish peer. Lady Teresa was very kind to him and seemed to have developed a real liking for him. It may be said that their friendship ripened as fast as any friendship could have done.

Of Mary Augustine, he had thus far seen very little. He met her one morning as he was picking his way through the tortuous and bustling Merceria. She was coming out of a stationery shop, the young Augustines and Hilliard Arnold were with her, and the tall figure of the Cavaliere loomed up in the back-

ground. Forester exchanged greeting with the party but did not join it. As he passed on he overheard a loudly whispered criticism made by a shapeless Venetian dame upon the Cavaliere's disregard for Continental etiquette. It was a harmless gibe, and it was spoken without malice, but it set Forester wondering why the Cavaliere had found it necessary to thus subject himself to the suspicious observation of his neighbors.

On another day, soon afterward, he came upon Mary and the Cavaliere as they were sitting upon the steps of one of the great bronze cisterns in the courtyard of the Ducal Palace.

This time there were no hostages offered to outraged Venetian propriety ; they were quite by themselves. Their faces were turned away from the *Porta della carta*, where he had entered, so that they did not observe

him. The Cavaliere was speaking in a low voice and gesticulating with the little nervous movements affected by Italians. They were evidently discussing some subject of more than ordinary interest, for Mary's up-turned face wore an intense look—as if she were drinking in, to its fullest extent, the wisdom which was rapidly falling from the thin, ascetic lips of her companion. Forester watched them for a few minutes and then stole away without making his presence known to them.

Led by a sudden impulse and with no particular object in view, he went directly to Lady Teresa's house. Almost as if by miracle, he found her alone. Her luminous eyes shone upon him with genuine pleasure as he entered the little room where she sat engaged in some kind of lighter feminine distraction. It was a very pretty room, not at all splendid

but for the presence of its rare occupant, who did not even require the accessories of a toilette. She was in a gown of faded chintz, her shapely feet were thrust into a pair of long-worn slippers, and her wonderful hair was a mass of tangled golden skeins.

“You must know how welcome you are,” she laughed, “since I consent to see you at all.”

Thus began a pleasant, time-serving hour devoted to that species of conversation which costs little effort beyond the moderate exercise of the delicate mechanism of speech. It was by no means a difficult or tiresome thing to carry on a conversation with Lady Josselyn; he had only to sit at his ease and watch the ceaseless motion of her lips as the stream of harmonious English words—imperfect, indeed, and reckless of idiom, yet singularly free and well-chosen—fell with Italian rapidity upon

his delighted ear. Had Mr. Forester heard the Somnambula at the Teatro Malibran? And did he not feel pity for the poor, little, frightened *debutante*, whose uncertain *vibrato* had been far too quavering even for Venice, where the *vibrato* is so much the fashion? Was she perhaps, mistaken, or had she then seen him in Mrs. Talcote's box during the *ballet fete* in La Fenice? And was it not the agreeable Mrs. Augustine who sat beside him on that occasion? And why was not the interesting Miss Augustine present? How did his entertaining friend, the Judge—of whom she declared herself altogether enamored—manage to while away the long hours in stupid Venice? Did not the estimable Judge grow weary of his daily tramp around the Piazza di San Marco and all the evenings spent upon the uncomfortable chairs outside the Café Florian? Had Mr. Forester a passion for

pictures? Perhaps—who knows?—he is himself a great painter—in a disguise. Are not such things happening? Did he know the great work of our master, Giovanni Bellini, the noble “Supper at Emmaus,” of the Church of San Salvatore, upon which Mr. Ruskin had put such a slight? And, speaking still of pictures, would it too painfully shock him to hear her confess that she had never yet looked upon the famous treasure of the Assunta Room?

“And it is even more astonishing,” she added clasping her hands in childish glee, “when I tell you that I was born beside the Accademia!”

“I am glad that you have never entered it. It makes me hope that I may sometime take you to see its wonders,” said Forester gallantly.

“Only to think,” she cried, laughing heartily,

“that you have come from far-off America on such a mission !”

“Viewed in that light, I could not have had a more agreeable duty imposed upon me,” said Forester, as if he meant it.

The gentleman was seated in a chair of Austrian wood of such fragile construction that it bent and creaked beneath his material presence as if it resented it.

“I am afraid that your furniture disapproves of me,” he said, in a jocose way.

“There is a reason for it !” she exclaimed, earnestly. “The chair was a gift from the Cavaliere—long years ago.”

“But your brother wished me to know you. I am indebted to him for my acquaintance with you. I dare say it would have come about in time ; but he hastened it.”

“He wishes it still. He hopes that you may soon feel the greatest interest in me. He

is afraid that you will in some way interfere with his plan."

"What is his plan?" Forester brusquely demanded.

"Have you not discovered it!" she asked, with a surprised look.

"I have discovered nothing," said he, "I have not been on the lookout."

"His plan contemplates the marrying of Miss Augustine—if it proves feasible," declared the lady, with an air of solemn conviction.

"If it proves feasible," repeated Forester, who was wondering to himself if the strange, tightened sensation in his heart was making any change in his face, into which the woman was gazing, with her great eyes all a-glow.

"Yes; if he satisfies himself that she is rich enough to repay him for—for the sacrifice," she replied, as if at a loss to find the proper words to express it.

“Looking at it in that way,—in the light of a sacrifice—the lady is certainly not rich enough to justify it,” he said.

“She is not rich then—for an American? I shall be glad to have him find it so. Would you consider it a sacrifice to marry Miss Augustine—yourself?” There was an excited glitter in her eyes.

Forester, who was recovering his habitual composure, smiled a little at this.

“I must answer your questions in turn,” he said. “First then, Miss Augustine is not rich—for an American; not at all rich compared with Mrs. Talcote. And again, in a purely speculative point of view, it would be a sacrifice for anybody to marry Miss Augustine.”

Lady Teresa seemed to be making certain that she understood all he was saying; she took on a sober and contemplative air, which was clearly genuine.

For all of that," she muttered, half to herself, "she may seem rich enough to an Italian. We are so very poor."


Forester drew his chair quite near her. It seemed to him that the time had come for him to, in some way, assert himself.

"Why do you say these things to me?" he demanded, looking her full in the face.

She gave him a quick, uncomfortable glance. "Perhaps it is because I am fond of you," she said, without a particle of coquetry in her voice.

"No," he responded promptly and firmly "I am not vain enough to think so."

Lady Josselyn leaned over toward him and laid her soft hand upon his shoulder. "You are right, my good friend," she said. "I like you, but that alone is not cause enough." Then she put her lips close to his ear and almost hissed it through her closed teeth: "It is because I hate the Cavaliere!"



Forester had a strong man's disgust for the histrionism of mere everyday emotion ; but there was something so different from that in such an interpretation of passion and hatred as this woman had just given, something so much deeper than an ordinary exacerbation of disposition, something so cultivated in its intensity and so far beyond appeal in its bitter determination, that he involuntarily shuddered and drew back.

Lady Teresa was quick to notice the effect she had produced, and she was in no haste to cut short the climax. When she spoke again her voice was very soft and broken.

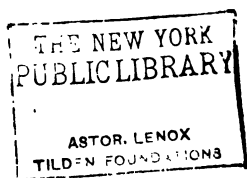
"I owe all my misfortunes to his meddlesome cleverness," she continued, with an excited throb in her white throat. "He made me break my own heart !"

And she bowed her head upon her hands and sobbed convulsively.

Forester knew her story. It was common property among all the gossips of this most gossip-loving of cities. All Venice knew well enough how the Ferri had set their vain hearts upon a brilliant future for the beautiful Teresa, by means of which they hoped to be lifted up out of the obscurity into which the changing fortunes of the province had plunged them ; how she gave her heart to a young Ravennese nobleman, who was poorer even than she ; and how, by the cunning management of the Cavaliere Augusto, she had been deprived of her lover and compelled to marry the Irish peer, who had turned out to be a man both vicious and of small estate.

The sympathizing American took one of her hands in his own and, bowing low, kissed the tips of her tear-stained fingers—more reverently than a man of her own people might have done.





"Believe me, madame, I am very sorry for you," he said with an earnestness that was almost tenderness.

She smiled at him, up through her tears.

"You have the right," she said, very softly indeed. "You are my good friend."

Then he went away, and, as he came out into the great open square, his face burned as if he already repented his part in the little melodrama which had just been played.

V


In the Basilica.

ONE morning, when the sun was pouring down a great flood of light into the Piazza, making the worn marbles hot and glittering, Forester sought refuge within the perpetual shadows of the Cathedral.

Some great function was in progress ; all the dazzling paraphernalia of an Apostolic worship was being brought to bear upon the already too barbaric interior of the most gorgeous Christian temple in the world. The High Altar and the adjacent chapels were blazing with the wealth of the *Tesoro* and crypts. The contented-looking canons, in surplices of uncommon fineness, were in their

stalls, making the whole Choir resound with their vigorous Gregorian. The patrician-looking Cardinal-Patriarch, in a cope of cloth-of-gold, sat beneath a canopy of his official red. The ancient and decrepit organ was groaning through its tuneless pipes, and a boy-choir from the *Scuoli* was singing antiphonally, in the most execrable of Italian falsetto.

Forester ascended the Choir steps and secured a position from which he could look upon the interesting ritual as it was being developed. He stood so near the wonderfully carved stalls that he could see the working of the muscles in the well-expanded necks of the gentlemen who were intoning the *Magnificat*; so near indeed, that a roguish acolyte, who at the *Pax Vobiscum* was incensing the satisfied-looking churchmen, one by one, gave him, also, a little extra whiff,—by way of making his acquaintance.



When the *Ita Missa est* had been sung with the long-drawn sonorousness which always accompanies that formal statement, and the robed functionaries had formed themselves into a procession according to the scale of ecclesiastical precedence—the least first and the greatest last—and had solemnly defiled into the Sacristy, Forester came down into the nave whose variegated and uneven floor re-echoed to the tread of the departing worshippers. The air was faint and misty with a hundred little dissolving clouds of incense, and the organ still piped out its wheezy harmony.

After the people had gone away and the sanctuary was left to its habitual quiet, broken only now and then by the prayerful sigh of some novena-maker or the bated explanation of a guide, Forester stepped out into the great Vestibule and stood before the grated

entrance to the Zeno Chapel. He looked through the bars and could hardly believe in his eyesight when he saw Mary Augustine sitting upon the pedestal of the great Cardinal's sarcophagus. To make his perplexity the more complete, he had been led to believe that Mary had gone to Chioggia, with a family-party, in the little steamer which left the Riva dei Schiavoni for the City of Picturesque Beggars, at a very early hour in the morning. He stood looking upon her with an air of utter astonishment. Then he took hold of the iron grating and shook it; but it was securely locked.

Mary was much amused at his look of doubt and discomfiture.

"First of all," she called out to him, "you must find the sacristan. When you have found him you must give him a *lira*; then he will come and unlock the door."

As soon as she could sufficiently compose herself, she explained that the sacristan, who had been showing her the wonders of the chapel had been called upon to unlock something—of which he alone possessed the key—and that he had hastily excused himself and gone away, promising to return immediately.

“And I suppose he locked me in here for safe keeping,” she added.

“I hope you have not been long imprisoned in the gloomy den,” said Forester, rather anxiously.

“Only a few minutes,” she assured him. “Besides it is by no means gloomy in here. Think of the time that the Cardinal has spent here! I ought not to complain—and I do not.”

“I think I could not deny myself that poor luxury. Both of you seem to be hedged in by circumstance.”

"I cannot speak for the Cardinal,—but I am enjoying it," she said; lightly. Then she added, a little nervously: "I hope I hav'n't said anything ghastly."

"You could scarcely say anything too ghastly to correspond with your surroundings," he declared. "I do not see that there is any room for levity in Venice; it is as much out of place as a coach-and-four would be in the Piazza. Whenever I laugh I feel that I am introducing a fashion."

"I have not felt it,—so poetically," she said, hesitatingly. "It seems to me to be the happiest, brightest place under the sun. I think I could live here forever without seeing a gloomy thing."

"I cannot think that an American could live here—always. It is not the place for him."

"There must be Americans who are living

in far less comfortable places,—in Kamtschatka, for example.”

“I prefer Kamtschatka,—for a permanent thing.”

The growing warmth of this discussion was suddenly cooled by the appearance of the sacristan, who, with many apologies for the delay, released the fair prisoner. He explained that the lock was a spring that had closed of its own accord.

If the Signorina could only know the regret he felt!

Mary assured him that she had suffered no real inconvenience and that she had found the Cardinal's society most unobtrusive. The old man did not wait to hear more but shuffled away as if he did not wholly approve of the young lady's good-nature.

After Mary's restoration to freedom, they seemed to be in no great haste to leave the

scene of her imprisonment. They sat down upon the low marble bench which is built around the interior of the marvellous *Atrio* whose walls and ceilings are a hundred Scripture stories charmingly told in a fadeless art, whose secret was long ago forgotten.

"I was thinking of you the very moment I made my lucky discovery," said Forester. "I was picturing you and the young people already repenting of your desire to see Chioggia and forced to kill time by getting up a scramble for *soldi* among the acrobatic youngsters of that degenerate city."

"I think I should not have encouraged the scramble," she said with a smile. "As it was, I decided at the last moment not to go. I wanted to see a full service in the Cathedral, and high festival-days are not common at this season." Then she added: "You must have visited Chioggia; you speak *so positively* of its unattractive features."

"Yes; I once spent a day there in the company of some gentlemen of rather artistic proclivities—and a lady," he answered dryly.

"Ah! there was a lady; that fact alone makes it a matter of interest to ordinary mortals. I suppose it was Lady Josselyn. How then, could the day have been uneventful?"

Forester believed that he could detect a slightly conscious ring in her clear voice, but when he looked at her honest face, he made up his mind that he had been altogether hasty in his suspicion.

"It must have been entirely uneventful," he affirmed, "or I could not so soon have forgotten the details. Let me see: I do remember now, that one of the young fellows made a very pretty picture of a fisherman's outfit; that we lunched upon tunny-fish, cooked before our very eyes, in a kettle of

boiling oil, by the most forbidding-looking padrona I have ever seen. I am also of the opinion that not one of us came back overburdened with amiability. I have scarcely made it up with my ruffled disposition, even to this day."

"I see that I have had a narrow escape," she said, greatly amused at his account. "I imagine, however, that the lady could go more into detail."

"Very possibly. I believe that ladies are very clever at details. I don't find Venetian women a whit behind their American sisters in that facility. Do you see much of Lady Josselyn?"

"No; I see very little of her,—far too little, I am afraid. When I remember how interesting she is, it is an effort to remind myself that I have not come here for social purposes."


"Are you not here for social purposes?"

"No. I have made up my mind to deny my self. I must at least make them subordinate to my real design."

"Why," exclaimed Forester, with a good deal of astonishment in his voice, "I supposed you came here because your English friends had made their plans to include Venice! If I do not seem impertinent—I do not wish to be that—may I ask what was your main object in coming here?"

Mary was a little annoyed, not so much at the directness of the question, as at its apparent obtuseness.

"Your question gives me a chance to air my national privilege,—to answer it by asking another," she replied, lightly. "What reason has anybody for wishing to see anything so interesting as Venice? I suppose I must have been impelled by the conventional



sentiment. Of course I wanted to see Alicia."

"Of course,—and Hilliard," he reminded her.

"Oh, as far as Hilliard is concerned," she laughingly declared, "I could have managed to exist without him for a few months,—I have seen a great deal of Hilliard! The fact is, I wanted to see St. Mark's and the Assunta."

"That is an excellent reason," he said, very carefully twirling the ends of his exceedingly thrifty moustache, as if a good deal depended upon the operation.

"It seems to me," she continued, "that the answer to your question is so simple that it cannot easily be found. What would you say if I were to ask you the same thing, and suddenly at that?"

"I would not hesitate to answer it,—not

for a moment," he replied, eagerly. "I am holding the answer *in petto* ; it shall be yours when you demand it."


A frightened look crept into her face. She did not speak, but she still smiled, nervously.

"You do not ask me. Have you no curiosity in the matter?"

With an effort to keep the fear out of her voice she replied : "No ; I have no curiosity."

"Then I will tell you !" he exclaimed passionately. "I came here because I knew you were here ! I wanted to see you !"

She did not raise her eyes from the sunken floor, where she had fixed them in bewildered expectation. He knew that she was trembling from head to foot. He knew that he had, for the second time, precipitated his fate, and he felt a sickening presentiment of its hopelessness. In the chaos of longing and tenderness which had engulfed him, his genuine



manhood felt a thrill of pity for the young girl beside him, who was growing white and troubled.

"I think you might say of me as I said of Hilliard," she went on, with a last struggle to command her unsteady voice. "I think you could say that you had seen enough of me in Hartford."

"I cannot say it! It would be a lie!" he cried, in a voice made brave by passion. "I would follow you to the ends of the earth!"

How many hearts have throbbed away in sad disorder within this self-same Vestibule of San Marco! Upon this cunningly-laid floor,—they point you to the very spot—three Sovereigns laid aside the arts of war and made a peace. This was a simple drama, but not less real, which was going on.

She spoke again. "Do you remember," she asked, very gently and sadly, "what I

said to you the night before I left Hartford?"


"Yes," he answered, hoarsely, "I remember it."

"No matter how much it pains me, no matter how much pain I shall give you, I must tell you that if you were again to ask me what you asked me on that night, I could only answer you as I did then,—I could say nothing else."

He bowed his head to signify that he understood everything she wished him to know.

"I am sorry you came to Venice—so sorry," she continued, in a voice of kindest pity. "You are so strong of will and so much a master of yourself that you might have taught yourself to say: 'She is not worth my while; I will forget her.'"

"I am not sorry," he said, painfully. "I am not ashamed to let you see how weak I am."



I shall never regret that I came. It comforts me."

After a few silent, dreadful moments, he spoke again.

"I would like to ask you," he said, "if my suit is more intolerable to you here than it was in Hartford?"


A deep scarlet flush swept over her clear-cut face like a wave of honest shame.

"Yes; it gives me greater pain," she replied, almost in a whisper.

"Ah! I thought so!" he said, bitterly. "Shall I go away from Venice for a while? Would it please you to have me out of your sight? I cannot promise not to return."

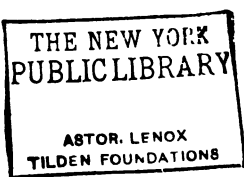
"I do not know. Do whatever is best," she answered helplessly.

He slowly arose and with a heavy, lagging step—as if the strength of his limbs had left them,—went out into the still fervent heat of the Piazza.



She sat for a long time where he had left her, motionless and half-crushed. There was a cruel pain at work in her heart, a sickening premonition of something she knew not what. She finally started up and entered the Basilica once more, and seeking its darkest corner knelt upon the prayer-worn marble, and wept as if her heart would break. A beggar-woman saw her kneeling there, and muttered, as she passed her by: "Poverina, she has quarrelled with her lover. It will do her good ; they will be friends again."





VI.

The Last of the Ferri.

It was quite true that the Cavaliere did not frequent the dull little house beside the Canonry. There were reasons for this evident lack of cordial relations between the scholarly physician and his beautiful sister,—and they were altogether sufficient to cause a suspension of mutual confidence. The family was not an old foundation. The elder Ferro, who was a Cavaliere and Court-Physician, had made himself distinguished by his novel pathological investigations in the Ospedale, of which he was long Chief. To his only son, Augusto, he had bequeathed his immortal

monograph, "The Nucleus of the Red Blood Corpuscle," his profession, an old house near the *Pinacoteca*, and little else. Augusto went to Padova at an early age, where he speedily attracted attention as a devoted student and a close observer. At the time he received his degree from this most autocratic of Universities,—where Harvey once taught his newly-discovered scheme of the Circulation of the Blood,—and had already entered upon his post-graduate course, his beautiful sister, who had only just come home from her convent, was in the full entanglement of the love affair with the young nobleman of Ravenna, whose ancestral estates had long been in the safe possession of the Government. There had been a great family upheaval. Teresa had rebelled and was sent back to the convent, where she was no longer the gay child of former years. The young gentleman


of Ravenna was aggressive, the disobedient Teresa was at a sentimental age, and it was discovered that an elopement had been arranged. At this point, the executive ability of Augusto was called into play. He was summoned home in great haste to prevent, by his superior diplomacy, the utter downfall of the family speculations. As the sequel showed, he had not failed to become master of the situation.

The troublesome lover disappeared—fled, it was whispered, a proscribed wanderer from his country,—and soon after, Teresa was married to Lord Josselyn, who, at that time, was blinding the covetous eyes of the Venetians with the price of his last acres.

There was a great dissimilarity of tastes between the brilliant, superficial woman and her erudite, taciturn brother. Teresa had flatly refused to lead the roving, half-insane

existence adopted by the Irish lord and had soon returned to the city of her nativity and established herself in her little house, quite secure in the dearly-purchased freedom of her married state. After a few months, the elder Ferro died of an acute lesion, and Augusto quietly stepped into his well-worn professional shoes. The gloomy old house near the Accademia was no longer a home for the embittered lady, and she felt no survival of an affection for the Cavaliere, whose conduct toward her she had made up her mind to regard as unnatural.


Beyond the mere selfish pride which he took in her remarkable personal attractions, the Cavaliere had neither affection nor admiration for his sister. He looked upon her as a woman far too indifferent to her natural advantages and far too devoted to matters of no actual worth ;—and his esti-



mate of her was doubtless correct, at least to a certain extent. He ascribed her levity to feminine incapacity and resigned himself to the belief that he had nothing to hope from her co-operation in any scheme which had for its object his own aggrandizement. He also felt with true Italian shrewdness that he must keep an eye on her doings, not so much lest she should suffer some personal embarrassment as the result of her heedlessness, as that some act of hers might reflect an injury upon himself and the course which he had marked out for his consideration. He had visited her only once since he had made the acquaintance of the Augustines, and on that occasion, he had, for some reason unknown to her, frankly told her of his plans with reference to Mary Augustine. She had let him go on in his deliberate fashion, without expressing either surprise or approval. She

did not interrupt him with so much as a question or a suggestion. She did not seem to feel the slightest interest in the matter,—she even once or twice during his avowal, repressed the prettiest symptom of a yawn. Her manner, which he had not exactly expected, put a sort of awkwardness upon him. He had not asked for her approval but he had expected an opinion of some kind. He took a hasty leave of her and went directly to the Café Quadri, where he soothed his dignified choler with not less than half a dozen cups of the puissant decoction of coffee which is dispensed there in the most fragile of chinaware.


In spite of her outward calmness, the Cavaliere's confidence had generated a real mental cyclone in his sister's brain. It is probable that, at that time, her hatred for her brother was the only genuine sentiment she possessed. She realized that the longed-for



opportunity to make him feel that he had been cruelly unjust to her, might be close at hand; and she firmly resolved that it should not escape her. She was not foolish enough to believe that the Cavaliere had any actual tenderness for the young girl whom he had made up his mind to marry. She thought him too sordid for that. There remained a point even more vulnerable—his self-interest; and she hoped to pierce it. She felt perfectly assured that, as clear-sighted as the Cavaliere undoubtedly was, he had utterly failed to appreciate both the intensity of her displeasure and the tenaciousness with which she clung to it. She also told herself—not without reason—that his ignorance in this respect would be to her advantage. With a woman's unaccountable foresight, she had long before divined the fact that John Forester's interest in Mary Augustine far exceeded the limit of mere

national comrade-ship ; so she had begun her plan with an effort to stimulate his activity.

The next step in her ambitious undertaking had been a systematic attempt to secure Mrs. Talcote as an ally ; but, to her complete surprise and defeat, she was met by a series of tactics so unexpected and inscrutable, that she abandoned the effort,—under the distressing conviction that the powerful American had gone over to the enemy. Mrs. Talcote, to every appearance, had been enchanted with the prospect. Such a triumph of pure intellectuality ! she pronounced it. She went on at some length on what she termed the “lovely union between Latin exclusiveness and the not less patrician development of Hartford.” She assured Lady Josselyn that the advantage of being born in Hartford was very considerable indeed ; a spot where the



Puritan idea had early taken root and flourished. She protested with delightful vehemence that the Puritan idea was "a dear, delicious, old thing."

"Really, Lady Josselyn," she cried, "it is almost as much to be able to claim Hartford for one's birth-place, as it is to be born in Venice! I speak entirely without prejudice,—for I first saw the light in Buffalo."

Poor Lady Teresa, who knew quite as much of these abstractions as she did of Sanscrit, was compelled to sit and listen to the most astonishingly fluent set of phrases that it had ever been her great misfortune to hear. And, finally, with her baby-like hands sweetly clasped, and her face like that of a greatly exaggerated Madonna, Alicia had besought the agitated lady to use every means within her power to bring about the greatly-to-be-desired result. "As for me," she


declared, "you may depend upon me. I will leave no stone unturned."

"But your good friend, Mr. Forester," suggested Lady Josselyn, tremulously. "How will it affect his happiness?"

"Don't mention it! John Forester indeed! Don't, I pray you, dear Madame, let John Forester prejudice you against American gentlemen as a class!" And Alicia, crafty Alicia, held out her hands imploringly.

Then Lady Teresa saw that she could do no wiser than go back to her dull little house. So she went sorrowfully away from the American Foundation.

The next day brought a prompt continuation of her discomforts. As she sat in her diminutive *salon*, feigning smiles, so that the two or three youthful admirers who sat with her might get no glimpse of her troubled heart, the Cavaliere was announced. From the



moment of his entrance the social temperature of the habitually gay little spot began to fall, and the boyish visitors withdrew with more celerity than etiquette demanded.

After the brother and sister were left alone together, there was silence for some minutes. The Cavaliere seemed to be collecting his forces, and the lady felt a sense of impending disaster which made her helpless to speak or even move. Her brother kept his searching eyes fixed upon her face, as if he had only now comprehended the charm that rested there.

Suddenly, he laid his hand upon her wrist, and as if he had made a discovery exclaimed :
"Teresa, I believe that you hate me !"

She made no effort to remove her arm from beneath his hateful touch. She looked up at his cloudy face and smiled wearily.

"Does your heart tell you so, Augusto? You have not been too kind to me—always."

"You have not always been kind to yourself, *mia bella*," he gravely replied.

"There is no merit in being kind to oneself. I began by expecting others to make my happiness,—but I was deceived," said she, bitterly.

"Why then have you not avenged and consoled yourself? You are possessed of sufficient power to serve you."

"I do not understand you," she said proudly.
"I have no taste for intrigue."

"Do you not see, my sister, that you and I have been too separate?" the Cavaliere continued, with a sadness in his voice. "Together, we might have been strong, but our foolish variance has made us despicable. I do not reproach you for our insignificance, nor



do I ask you to do anything for my sake; but Teresa, I do ask you—for your own sake—that you do not make me forget that I am your own flesh and blood.”

“You puzzle me, Augusto,” she said. “I do not know you when you clothe yourself in sentiment.”

“That is because you will not know me well.”

“No; I do not know you well,” she admitted, with a long sigh. “I am not profound enough to know you well, my dear Cavaliere.”

“And yet I come to you with my arms extended. I give you my confidence, and I do not ask a return. I am weary of our senseless quarrel. Why has not time straightened out the little angles of our earlier actions? Let us look at matters dispassionately! Let me acknowledge that I once did you an injury—unintentional as it was! I told myself that I

could save you from the disaster of a girlish folly. Is there, in your offended sight, no merit in my intention ? ”


Lady Josselyn was motionless and silent. There was a far-away expression upon her face, and he doubted whether she was following him.

“ What do you say ? What do you think, my sister ? ” he insisted.

“ What do I think ! ” she echoed. “ I was thinking how great you must have been had you professed with the *Gesuiti*.”

The polished Cavaliere’s dark face flushed as if he had been insulted by a beggar. But he did not permit his astuteness to fail him at so slight a provocation. “ You do me too much honor,” he said. “ It is indeed a great career. The *Gesuiti* are again received with open arms,—in every country.”

“ Is it a greater career to marry Miss



Augustine?" she demanded, looking him full in the face.

"Yes," he unflinchingly replied. "It promises better for me. And this gives me an opportunity of offering you another proof of my confidence. It is definitely arranged that I am to marry Miss Augustine."

"Is not Miss Augustine heretical?" asked Lady Josselyn in the most matter-of-fact way.

"She is heretical," replied the Cavaliere, with a shrug of his shoulders. "In this progressive age, one does not hesitate over such trifles. I am sufficiently orthodox for both. There will be the civil marriage at the office of the municipality—which is the only legal marriage since the Union—and, afterward, a modified church ceremony without the Benediction; and, if anything further is demanded, I am prepared to satisfy the scruples of the American Foundation with a schismatical rati-

fiction. That can be easily managed ; there is no lack of English parsons."

If the Cavaliere had counted upon the effect which his confidence would produce upon his sister, he must have suffered a keen disappointment. Her manifestations of interest were as conspicuously absent as were her words of congratulation. As acute an observer as her wily brother was, he utterly failed to gauge her present expressionless mood. He could only conclude, that as far as his plans were concerned, she was entirely apathetic ; and the belief inspired a pique such as he had seldom felt. Had he then ceased to be of any moment in the world in which this unforgettable woman lived her life ?

"My affair does not seem to have excited you Teresa," he said, half-bitterly, half sardonically.

Then he rose and walked across the floor



as if his visit was drawing to a close. Consummate master of himself as he was, his patience had grown less and less a creature of his own.

He drew himself up to his full stature and in a manner most dramatic, and wholly Italian, began the prelude to his master-stroke.

"I am the bearer of weightier news," he said. "Like the host of the parable, I have kept the best for the last." He took from his pocket an envelope, unsealed, and of an official tint, and held it out to her. The beautiful Venetian's face grew as pale as that of her prototype, the Saint pictured by Palma Vecchio and beloved of warriors, when she was led out to her martyrdom. She snatched the paper from the Cavaliere's outstretched hand, tore off the cover and read it with suspended breath. It was a telegram sent to her brother, from Henrietta Street, Dublin, by Lord Josselyn's valet, and it contained the

information that the unfortunate peer had been thrown from his horse and killed outright.

Lady Josselyn dropped the paper from her trembling hand with an Italian's horror of anything suggestive of Death. Her breath came in convulsive gasps, and her eyes were wild with the terror of her sudden, awful, freedom.

The Cavaliere spoke to her, softly, almost tenderly. "Will you have my friendship, Teresa?" he asked.

She turned upon him with a face convulsed with fear and helplessness. She saw him with his stern, cruel features softened and pitying. His hand was already extended to grasp the peace he sought with her.

"Stop, Augusto!" she cried, holding up her hand as a barrier. "You shall answer me one thing! When you drove the Marchese

from his native Ravenna, burdened with the vilest reputation a gentleman could suffer, I bitterly accused you of being the instigator of the calumny ; and you were silent. But look into my face and say, ‘ Teresa, you have misjudged me ; I am innocent,’ and I will turn my long years of hate into a life of penance and reparation. What do you say, my brother ? ”

The Cavaliere, with a face heavy with shadows, turned abruptly upon his heel and left her where she stood like an expectant Nemesis.

“ Her freedom has made her insufferable ! ” he muttered.

VII.


The Nervous Element.

ON the day when Lady Teresa had so dejectedly turned her back upon the American Foundation with the conviction that she had altogether failed in her attempt to secure the powerful co-operation of Mrs. Talcote in the desperate scheme of thwarting—by a single stroke of bold diplomacy—the designs of her ambitious brother, there was a great commotion in the heart and brain of the perplexed American lady. To do her justice, it is necessary to state, that she, on her part, had not at all comprehended the purpose of Lady Josselyn's visit. She even be-

lieved that the Venetian's confidence was only another example of that subtle finesse which begins by throwing its victim off his guard, and, as such, she had used her utmost skill in meeting it, with what she regarded justifiable cunning. So, she had so skilfully dissimulated that Lady Teresa had been completely deceived and crushed.


It is not improbable that the depth of Alicia's disapproval could, at first, have been found in what she chose to consider as little less than treachery on the part of Mary Augustine. How could she do such a thing—take such an important step without first obtaining the sympathy of her oldest friend? How could she, without her friend's advice, have undertaken even the most incipient preliminaries of such a matter? And to this, there was speedily added the poignancy,—which every clever woman feels,—of having failed

to discover that which had been going on under her very eyes,—to the successful development of which, she had doubtless contributed in more ways than one, and for which, she might, in a certain sense, be held responsible. Had she not, almost as soon as Mary had set foot in Venice, advised her to profit by the erudition of the Cavaliere? Who could have deemed this Hartford school-girl capable of such dissimulation? Who indeed could have suspected an American girl to be afflicted with such shocking taste? Was the Italian really possessed of any good parts? Yes; he was distinguished-looking, learned, and he had a profession. Had Mary fallen in love with him or was she only dazzled by his superior attainments? Would Mary really accept him? Was it not possible that he had not yet asked her, and that she was still in ignorance of his intention?



All these questions and many others, of greater or less significance, persisted in thrusting themselves upon the immediate attention of Mrs. Talcote's disturbed mental apparatus. One thing only offered her a tangible satisfaction, and that she firmly settled upon ; it was the fact that something must be done. Every means must be brought to bear against the consummation of this perfectly unheard-of sacrifice. Her earliest impulse had been to fly to the American Consulate and insist upon national intervention. Upon reflection, however, she concluded that the consul—who, at that time, chanced to be a New England gentleman of a pronounced literary turn, greatly devoted to the then almost unknown analytical method of novel-writing, of which he has since become the most delightful master—might hesitate, or perhaps decline to act in a matter of such

imminent necessity. She had heard something of the long delays which are a part of the essence of Diplomacy, and she realized that great haste would be required if anything was to be successfully done. Then, she, of course, bethought herself of the International Telegraph ; and she resolved to furnish Mrs. Arnold a full account of the affair from beginning to end ; in this way getting rid of a part, at least, of her burden of responsibility. But this idea seemed to promise so little—she knew that Mary's mother was a woman who never went to any extremity over matters, no matter how desperate they might be—that she gave it up. She did not put much confidence in the hope that any special activity was to be expected from the Augustines ; but she determined to go to them and point out the danger, so, that, at least somebody's eyes would be open.



Having settled upon this way of doing, she was on the point of leaving her house to go to the Palazzo Blumenberg, when Mary Augustine herself walked in as unconcernedly as if there were no such emotions as Love and Injured Friendship. As she entered the room, Alicia could not help being struck with the fact that this remarkably earnest-looking young woman appeared in no degree whatever like a maiden stricken with that most common of all maladies, First Love.

“Mary Augustine!” began her large friend, with a quaver in her voice, already suggestive of an attack of that neurosis which is at once a bane and refuge, “Lady Josselyn has just been telling me something perfectly sickening about you!”

“Indeed,” replied Mary, very calmly seating herself in an especially comfortable chair. “I never suspected Lady Josselyn of a fondness for gossip,—I mean hateful gossip.”

"I don't believe it ! I will not believe it !" almost shrieked Alicia, now a step farther along in her hysterical development. "It's too horrid to be true !"


"My dear Alicia," said Mary, a little anxiously. "You are going on very strangely. Has anything happened—anything serious ?"

"How can you be so—so unfeeling."

And here Alicia made a clutch at that region anatomically known as the *pomum Adami*. "Has anything happened to *you* !"

"Yes, dear ; something has happened to me, and I have at once come to you—my oldest and best friend. I have promised to marry the Cavaliere Ferro," said Mary with a perfectly free and unembarrassed air.

This frank outburst of confidence was too much for the already functionally-uncertain heart of Mrs. Talcote. With an heroic spasm, half choking, half tears, she threw her arms



around Mary's neck. "Oh, darling," she sobbed, "If I knew it would make you happy I could forgive myself! I could almost forgive him!"

At this Mary burst into a fit of laughing, in which she was presently joined by Alicia, who suddenly realized the absurdity of her conduct.

"I suppose there must be a risk," Mary admitted, philosophically.

"Do you know, dear," said Alicia, "that before we came abroad, I used to think that John Forester was the coming man?"


"That was the refinement of absurdity in you, dear," said Mary, with sudden gravity.

"I suppose I am ridiculous—occasionally," confessed Mrs. Talcote. "I wonder what the Judge will say."

"I don't think he will *say* much. He may *think* a good deal."

- Then the two friends talked the matter over quite dispassionately, from beginning to end. At the close of an hour, the only point of difference between them referred to the sanctuary where the religious ceremony would be performed.

When *petite* Mrs. Fanny Augustine was informed of the state in which matters stood, she maintained with characteristic vigor, that the whole affair was disgraceful and clearly the result of Mary's intimacy with that radical creature, Mrs. Talcote. Having steadfastly clung to this opinion for fully one hour, at the end of that period she pronounced the Italians a race of shameless marplots and strongly hinted—to the stout barrister—that she had suspected the Ferri from the very moment she first set her eyes upon them. "I have no sort of patience with the Cavaliere," she declared, "He is plainly half-




apothecary, half dilettante. How do we know that he is not in league with scores of these rascally shopmen who are continually labeling their trumpery wares *L'oro fino* ! What account does he give of himself ? Tom, it is your duty to investigate him,—and pray don't spare him. If he is a surgeon, where are his patients ? Who knows anything of this modern nobleman ? Who is he ? ”

Mary's half-brother received the news of her engagement in a stoical manner. He did not mind admitting that the business had, what he termed, “ a deucedly offish look ; ” but he insisted that he had found Mary quite capable of looking after herself. So that when his wife was excitedly demanding information of him concerning the Italian method of passing away the time, he was sufficiently resigned to quiz her a little.

“ What does he do ? ” he went on with an air

of great wisdom. "That is simple as simple can be. He turns out at ten o'clock, sips a thimbleful of black coffee and borrows the journal of the butcher underneath him. Presently he struts into the Aurora and takes his second minim of coffee, and, by and by, gets into an argument with two majors, who are masquerading in opera-chorus jackets and waistcoats. They jabber away for an hour with all the wisdom of Cavour. Then he goes away to a cheaper *albergo* and lunches off a bit of bread, a ha' penny worth of strawberries and a penny-worth of wine. Then he goes away and gets a siesta. After that he despatches the padrona to his tailor and hires a dress-coat for the evening. Then he has his dinner, which invariably consists of some sort of *potaggio* made thick with *pasta*, a salad swimming in rancid oil, a radish, and a *demilitre* of cherries. Then he is ready for an evening



at lady-killing. The very last you hear of him is toward morning, when he comes down the Grand Canal in a battered gondola, howling away at a *scena* from some worn-out work, in the most beastly of tenors."


And the jovial barrister paused, as if he had given the last touches to a very choice bit of description.

Mrs. Fanny appeared to thoroughly approve of her husband's delicate estimate of the Venetian way of living. "At what a heavy rate you do go on," she remarked, simply, yet admiringly. "But, Tom dear, tell me, isn't such a marriage illegal? Isn't it contrary to the spirit of English law?"

"It will be a go, I fancy," replied the barrister, who rarely worried himself over law points. "English law isn't of much matter in a country like this. It's a rum country, Fanny."

Having delivered this sage opinion, which was fully concurred in by his bright little partner, Tom Augustine went off in search of his boys, who at that moment, were engaged in forcing the contents of a huge paper cornucopia upon the attention of the already surfeited pigeons of the Piazza. When he had found them, he took them off to the Lido, much to the relief of the descendants of old Dandolo's winged messengers. So, it will be observed that Mrs. Talcote had judged wisely that no well-organized opposition was to be expected from Mr. Tom Augustine, who conscientiously divided his time between the aquatic facilities of the Lido and the brandy-and-water of the Hôtel Bauer.


And so it was that the Cavaliere and Mary had no violent interference to stimulate their love-making, even though the enthusiasm of their friends had not been aroused to an unusual extent.



The Lady Teresa seemed to have given up the hope of disturbing the smoothness of her brother's arrangements. It was understood among the friends of the Ferri, that her suddenly-inflicted widowhood would not, under the circumstances, cause any postponement of the marriage, which, after all, would be, from its mixed theological aspect, more an affair of formality than jubilation.

As soon as the report of the good fortune of the Ferri had become current in Venice, where, as is well known, news is disseminated with a rapidity entirely disproportionate to the prevailing slowness which invests everything (except the church-bells), a more or less disjointed procession of shabby gondolas stole up to the water steps of the Palazzo Blumenberg and discharged their cargoes of curious, parchment-skinned dowagers, who were evidently drawn thither by some power more ex-

acting than mere etiquette. One of these was the Contessa Coän, a distant relative of the Cavaliere's mother. She was a diminutive creature whose toothless mouth and wrinkled face put her beyond all criticism respecting age. Her eyes were as far-reaching as a raven's, and her hair was perfectly white and of the texture of coarse hemp. Her Hebrew-like nose gave much credit to the tradition that she had been born in the Ghetto, although she professed herself to be a devoted churchwoman. As strongly presumptive evidence of her Israelitish origin, it was asserted that she was constantly engaged in mercantile affairs. She was indeed well known to be a silent partner in more than one of the tiny *magasins* of the Piazza, which furnish specialties in Murano products. It was also one of the Lady Teresa's most successfully repeated *bonmots* that her great-aunt had managed a




booth at the great annual Fair of St. Antony of Padova, ever since the canonization of that popular celebrity. The Contessa came in one afternoon from Mestre, where she lived in a half-submerged old house, and spent an hour in plying Mary with questions, many of them of a financial nature. Mrs. Fanny pronounced her to be the most barbarous old person she had ever seen, and, indeed, the Contessa, in her plain, black cotton gown, pointed shoes, rusty veil and huge gilt ear-rings, might well have seemed, at least, barbaric. At her departure, she announced her intention of being present at the marriage, from which,—she rather more than insinuated—she expected little good.

Lady Teresa came also, looking more beautiful than ever in her soft, clinging weeds. Mary had gone to her immediately after the news of Lord Josselyn's death and had been

greatly struck with her changed manner. She had found her strangely quiet and depressed,—for it was understood in Venetian society that Lady Teresa had no cause to be inconsolable. She had said almost nothing, but sat looking at Mary with her lovely eyes full of something akin to pity. When, after an uncomfortable half-hour, they had separated, she pressed her young visitor's hand very gently and sighed long and sorrowfully. Although Mary had been somewhat astonished, she had attributed Lady Josselyn's manner to her desire to show a conventional melancholy.

During Lady Teresa's call, which was a surprise to the Augustines, her modified conduct was hardly less to be reconciled with her former sprightly methods. She seemed to be laboring under a species of embarrassment and spoke in a suppressed fashion, and her few remarks were uttered very much at random.



The climax came when Mrs. Fanny was called away by some household urgency and Lady Teresa was left alone with Mary. She clasped the girl's slender fingers within her own more exquisitely-fashioned hands and burst into a passion of unannounced tears. At first, Mary was greatly disturbed, but she finally ascribed a part at least, of this excessive sensibility, to the flexibility of the Southern temperament.

"My dear Lady Josselyn," she began, very soothingly, "I am afraid you are making yourself ill."

Lady Teresa protested against this sweetly-proffered sympathy with a little, sad gesture of despair.

"My dear Miss Augustine," she said almost in a whisper, "I am not ill; I am in torment. Would it be a great suffering for you to give up the Cavaliere?"

A fearful doubt of her visitor's sanity took possession of Mary's mind. Lady Teresa was intently watching her out of her grief-dilated eyes.


"Would you suffer,—in your heart?" she insisted.

"I do not know what you mean," said Mary, a chill taking possession of her heart.

"I do not know how to tell you what I mean," groaned the other, in sad misery. "Now, when I most need to be strong, I am nervous and cowardly; and yet I cannot take the risk of not saying that which I almost lack the strength to say. I must tell you; there is no other way for me."

"You need not fear to say anything to me, —anything that is necessary," said Mary, coldly.


"Then I will go on," said Lady Josselyn, with desperate calmness. "You must have



learned my history as it is told in Venice. It has been as fully discussed here as has the last Syllabus at Rome ; yet it has never once been entirely told. Bear with me a little, for I must relate it,—for the last time, I hope it may be.

“ I was a young and happy girl, always singing and never in tears. My mother died before I ever knew her, and I knew no home so joyous as the convent, where the sisters were so kind to me that I loved them for their own sakes. One day I was sent home to my father's gloomy house where everything was shadowy and moth-eaten,—and my father was darker than all. At a stiff little reception given by his aunt, I first saw the Marchese Dorian, who had only upon that day finished his school-days with the *Gesuiti*, and my life began to grow bright again in spite of my loveless home. We met secretly, when-

ever we could avoid suspicion, and we promised, by all the tender vows of youth, to be constant,—hoping that the time when we could be united would be hastened by some happy chance. Through an unfortunate blunder, my father discovered our sweet friendship, and fell into so violent a passion that I screamed with terror. I was sent back to the convent, forsaken and almost reckless. The sisters were as kind as ever but not as friendly as before. I felt that I was always under an espionage, which was not relaxed, day or night. In spite of the zeal of my guards, I found means to elude their vigilance and to obtain news of the Marchese. In the course of time, an elopement was planned, as rash as it was fatal. The plot was exploded, and my brother undertook to make an end of my lover. They told me, in answer to my tears of rage



and misery, that he had fled his country with a dishonored name. Augusto came to me and vowed that the Marchese's crimes were too terrible to be named. He bade me be reconciled and marry Lord Josselyn, who had offered himself. I obeyed, but my heart was broken. I taunted him with the ignominy of having himself invented the scandals which had driven my friend away ; I was wild with rage, and I struck him in the face. But then, I did not know the truth ; I only suspected it. Years afterward, when my grief had grown less violent, I found out that my suspicions were the facts ; my brother had perjured himself and driven my lover to his death. I have been taught the art of hiding my heart, and I have learned the secret well, but I have not forgiven the Cavaliere. Will you give your young life to this man who is


nothing less than a murderer in my sight? Will you marry him, Miss Augustine, now that you know these things?"

The young girl's brain was going blindly around in a tumultuous whirl; the color had left her face, and her lips were livid and parched. She slowly and painfully rose from her chair, and stood confronting her visitor with a look of suddenly inspired horror and disgust.

"Have you told me everything you wish to tell?" she asked, in a constrained voice.

"I have told you everything," replied Lady Teresa, simply. "Ask him whether it is the truth!" she said.

All the girl's native honesty and loyalty leaped, with a great light, into her flashing eyes. "I will not ask him! I do not believe you!" she said.





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Without another word, the beautiful Venetian covered her face with her widow's veil and walked unsteadily out of the *salon*.

VIII.

The Rationale.


IT is not likely that when Mr. Tom Augustine jocosely formulated the conditions under which the modern Italian gentleman flourishes, he had intended his description to be broad enough to include the Cavaliere Augusto Ferro. The latter gentleman, to do him justice, possessed very little in common with the well-known and strongly melodramatic person, who, from time immemorial, has figured—modified to suit all occasions—as the typical Italian, half Chesterfield, half desperado and wholly Mephistopheles. First of all, he stood well among the most worthy of his




fellow men. At the Ospedale, he was esteemed the most rising pathologist in the profession. His opinions were beginning to be considered authority, more especially his views upon some of those minute discoveries, which were only then becoming popular in Venetia, where the hatred felt for their Viennese originators, had, during the Occupation, to some extent retarded the progress of scientific research. He also enjoyed a certain popularity at the clubs, at least among those conservative organizations composed of men who had renounced the fire-eating tendencies of their youth, and had quietly availed themselves of the security which the Union offered both their persons and estates. His position in the social world of his native city was a particularly safe and enviable one. Even the clergy—which at that time, had lost a good deal of the prestige it once enjoyed—looked

upon him as a man who need not be expected to succumb to any of the rationalistic vagaries which had obtained so strong a hold upon Young Italy. He had, indeed, on more than one occasion, expressed his horror of Liberalism, which he declared to be only another name for Revolution.

He was the reputed author of a pamphlet, in which he took the dignified ground so ably advocated by the Spaniard, Donoso Cortés, in his "Essay upon Catholicism." Besides being a ripe scholar, in easy possession of several languages and on the diligent way toward the victory over others, he was gifted with a peculiarly correct literary insight, which made him a delightful companion for all the young writers who were struggling so vigorously to restore the depreciated tastes of their countrymen. He had long been an enthusiastic toiler over the crudities of the English language,




which he had actually mastered,—even to its most absurd idiom. He had a preference for works of American origin, especially for the efforts of those brilliant inventors of fiction of whom it may be said, that they have already founded a school. He had acquired the habit of making himself familiar with every book of the invaluable Tauchnitz edition, which Münster, the enterprising book-seller of the Piazza di San Marco, had put upon his shelves ; and many of them had been put there at his suggestion. In spite of the uncertainty of his family, there was no shadow of extrinsic vulgarity about the Cavaliere ; his manners closely approached perfection. His habits were correct and abstemious, and it might be said of him that he had attained the mastery over his senses,—a victory doubtless won by his long years of study, and the simple regimen and close mental examen, peculiar to the




scholastic state, which in Italy, is the only real student-life.

At a very early period of their acquaintance,—almost from the moment Mrs. Talcote had bidden her profit by his superior wisdom,—Mary Augustine had found the Cavaliere Ferro to be the most fascinating man she had ever met. Her opinion concerning the young men she had heretofore known did not go beyond a generous recognition of their several merits, which, to be accurate, had not been extraordinary. It is possible that this young woman—who had lived thus far under the peculiarly circumscribed conditions which obtain in a small New England city—had set up too lofty an ideal of what a man ought to be. All the men she had known, so she told herself, were as mentally unformed as she was, as confused in perception, as illogical in expression. She was acquainted



with several college professors, who were understood to have perfected themselves, as far as men can make themselves perfect, in the specialties which they most affected ; but she had found no difficulty in discovering them weak where she had most expected to find them strong. Once, when she was quite a young girl, far too young to have made such a remark, she had declared, in the instance of a popular young man, who was everywhere acknowledged to be a handsome and witty person, that she had no patience with a man who flourished upon the credit of these superficial qualities. If he chanced to be possessed of personal beauty, his shallow wit called off the attention it deserved ; if he had been cast in a plainer mould, his flippancy must have made the fact conspicuous ; and she would have yielded a willing homage to his personal attractions, had not his mental




antics distracted her. The precocity of these sentiments was no doubt justly due to the temporary influence of a neighboring metaphysician, whose "Mental Philosophy" had just been adopted as a text-book in the school she frequented. She had been a conscientious recipient of such educational advantages as the schools of her native city afforded,—and they are understood to be unexcelled. The rather severe curriculum which is now-a-days set before the young woman who is ambitious to be learned, had proved none too severe for her ; she only found fault with that trying haste, so prevalent in our best schools, which forbids the least approach to thoroughness.

Between Mary and John Forester, there existed a friendship which antedated her school-girl period. She could not remember when he had not been the same fair and dig-


nified gentleman, a little inclined to robustness. She had a greater respect for him than for any other gentleman of her acquaintance, now excepting, of course, the Cavaliere. She would not have had a moment's hesitation in giving him her entire confidence. She was aware that his fund of information on practical questions was inexhaustible, and that his advice was esteemed a perfectly safe rule to act upon. She also knew him to be a man of great influence among his countrymen, and that he was in possession of considerable wealth which he had both inherited and increased. When he had asked her to marry him, just before she came away from Hartford, she had been greatly surprised, for she had never thought of him in the light of a suitor. The affair had given her no pain and but slight embarrassment; for Forester had been so deliberate that she fancied he

must be indifferent. When her mother confessed how great a disappointment her refusal had been to her, she declared the whole matter to be preposterous,—too ridiculous to think of, much more to discuss. Mrs. Arnold had been shocked over what she considered lack of seriousness in her daughter. She had complained—to no less a person than John Forester himself—that it had been the only instance within the scope of her recollection, where Mary had failed to appreciate the gravity of a thing.

When she found that her steadfast lover had followed her across the seas, she had been more annoyed at his pertinacity than flattered by his constancy. When he had frankly avowed his intention of keeping an eye upon her—as he had done upon the occasion of their first meeting in Venice—she had inwardly accused him of a direct viola-



tion of taste. She realized that it was not a common thing for a man to leave his country behind him and follow in the rapidly-changing footsteps of the woman who had refused to marry him ; and the fact that he had done this, although it showed him to be free from malice, added no strength to his cause. He saw, indeed, that he had made a mistake in coming at all. He admitted as much to the Judge, with whom he had discussed the various phases of the matter with the freedom of a great intimacy. They were sitting, at the time, at one of the small tables which are put out half-way into the Piazza by the enterprising proprietor of the Café Florian. It was evening, of course, and the great square was ablaze with lights ; there was music of a decidedly martial character going on, and a voluble, gesticulating throng of people was passing to and fro across the rows of marble slabs



which are laid into the most wonderful pavement in the world. Judge Talcote was smoking a cigar,—and so was John Forester, for that matter,—and neither of them had spoken a word for twenty minutes. The Judge had spoken last, and his concise remark had been expressive but not elegant. He had ejaculated, very spiritedly for him: “It’s a damnable business!” To this strong declamatory effort, Forester had not at once replied, or if he had, his words had been lost in the resounding *fortissimo* of the lively movement which the military band had attacked.

“Yes; it is a bad enough business—especially bad for me,” admitted Forester, when the brasses had spent themselves in a final burst of triumphant fury. “I think that just now—as the matter stands—I am in need of more sympathy than I am likely to get. Isn’t it so?”

"Yes, John ; it looks very much that way," replied the Judge.

Then the music broke out afresh, and there was no more chance for conversation until it was over.

Then the Judge, who was in a strangely talkative mood, went on. "The Italian isn't such a contemptible scoundrel either. I wish he would hurry up and show himself a little more of a villain. It's all there, somewhere."

"It may appear upon a closer acquaintance. On the other hand, you may be mistaken. He may prove worthy of—anything."

"I can't think it. I firmly believe that he will show the cloven foot before you go back to America. Do you think she would be quick to discern anything of the kind?"


"I am certain she would," replied Forester decidedly, "she is unusually keen."

“Do you think she looks upon it in the light of an experiment?”

“You are entirely too metaphysical upon the subject,” said Forester, loyally. “If it is an experiment, it is our business to make it a successful one.”

The Judge muttered something strangely like “poor fellow,” under his breath, signalled the reproachful-looking waiter who had been hovering near them, and ordered brandy-and-water—for two.

Forester did not remain in Venice while the preparations for the wedding were going on; but he did not go far away. First he tried Vicenza, whence an acquaintance of the lady Teresa’s wrote her that the Signore spent the whole day long in promenading up and down the Corso. Did the Lady Teresa know whether the Signore had an admiration for the works of the great architect Palladio?



After that, he went to Verona, where he might have been discovered in an equally close study of the crenelated monstrosities of the Scaligers.

IX.

Under Suzerainty


THERE is a church in Venice, which is of so little reputed beauty among the wealth of splendid temples, that most people who go there neither see nor hear of it. It is dedicated to San Pietro, and it was the cathedral-church of Venice for more than two centuries. Behind one of the curious altars, they show you the chair in which St. Peter sat at Antioch, and after that they can no longer interest you, unless you are so fond of pictures that you care to look at two or three which are badly hung, and the work of painters of whom you have never before heard. It is

barely possible, however, that you may be drawn to this old sanctuary by the pretty history which is attached to its weather-beaten walls. It is a charming bit of the real story of humanity which has inspired more than one romancer. As the account runs, all the marriageable girls of Venice, who were ready and willing, used to come to this Church in a body, once every year—where they met their lovers and were married by a bishop, with a single blessing. One year, when the lovers were a little dilatory, the pirates of neighboring Trieste, stole in and bore away the expectant, white-robed brides to their ships.

No such fate, however, made a tragedy out of a quiet wedding which was celebrated here upon a brightly perfect Michaelmas morning—the wedding of Mary Augustine and the Cavaliere Ferro. It was conducted with the

greatly modified ritual which the Church accords to mixed marriages. With the approval of her friends, Mary had declined to avail herself of the Cavaliere's delicate concession to any heretical scruples which would make a schismatical confirmation of their union desirable. Such a proceeding—as Mrs. Talcote fully explained to a party of interested friends, upon her return to America—would have brought the marriage rite into contempt, by its frequency and consequent familiarity.

About the ceremony itself, there is really very little to relate. It is true that Mrs. Talcote, in a letter which she immediately afterward composed and despatched to an American friend, found no difficulty in making a long and interesting account of it. But then, she enlarged, to the extent of several pages, upon the lace of the officiating




priest's surplice, which her practiced eye discovered to be well-darned, ancient Venetian, of an unusually rare pattern. She also had a good deal to say about the priest himself, who was a stout, sun-burned gentleman with a shaven crown, a friend of the Ferri, whose ordinary avocation it was, to be rowed up and down the *Canale Grande* in a brown gondola, whence he issued, at stated intervals, bare-headed and bare-footed,—in a brown habit, tied about his ample waist with a hempen cord—bent on mendicant purposes. Alicia fancied that his weather-beaten features wore a quizzical expression, as if he regarded his present occupation as a diversion of an especially jovial character.

The Ferri began to live their married life in the musty palazzo near the Accademia. It had sheltered the family since its foundation, and a far more splendid dynasty before it.

Some of the dust and gloom **had been dispelled**, and a little modern restoration and renovation done, under the auspices of Mrs. Fanny, who had developed a warm interest in the house which her husband irreverently styled "a beggarly hole."


In this "beggarly hole," made sweet and bright by the fresh young life which had entered it with no other thought beyond a prayer to be assimilated to it and to the ways and fortunes of its master, the Ferri passed the first winter of their fellow-ship. The Augustines went home to the orderly house in Kensington, and the Talcotes, surfeited with state, abdicated, and returned to the great white house beyond the seas. Forester, having put his young charge under the protection of the Judge, took an apartment in Florence, where—to borrow from Mrs. Talcote—he was deeply engaged in cultivating his taste.



It was a fine winter with only a passing breath of frost at the holidays to make them seem real. The sun streamed into the Piazza day after day, week after week, so genially and warm that the merry, thriftless vagabonds that swarm there did not regret the summer and their stockingless feet. It was gay, too, and there was a brisk revival of those social exchanges which the long and hated Occupation had almost extinguished. That proud, impoverished Seignory which had despised and tolerated the Austrian under coercion, at his departure came out of its self-imposed duress, and sought the long-forgotten warmth of society. The lady of the rejuvenated old palazzo of the Ferri, achieved a marked social triumph in a series of receptions which she undertook. Her pretty *salone* was the brightest and best frequented in Venice. It was esteemed the fashion to be often seen at these

novel gatherings, where the company was made up of native celebrities, with a fair sprinkling of the people of all the countries which help to make Venice the most cosmopolitan city of Italy. The Cavaliere seemed to have undergone a marvellous transformation. The whole town was sounding the praises of his tardy hospitality, and his harvest was growing white with the glory it yielded him in the estimation of his countrymen. To his young wife he was benignantly—almost paternally—gracious. She bowed herself down before his erudition and never ceased wondering at its immensity. Thus he ruled her, for her respect for knowledge was of the kind which is slow to grow weary in its homage. In a letter to Alicia, written during this first winter, the motive of her determination is everywhere apparent.

“Only to think,”—she wrote—“that some



part of whatever can be said or done, no matter by whom or how, must be penetrated by his insight !”

Mrs. Talcote was no laggard at her pen, and she employed a frankness of expression toward her friends which had given them many shocks—some of them destructive to friendship itself. She took Mary sharply to task for what she denominated her “dangerous tendency to hero-worship,” and bade her not forget that she was still an American ; and she did not spare the Cavaliere. At the close of the characteristic and absurd letter, she begged Mary, once for all, to beware of losing her individuality as she had sunk her identity. “Keep yourself separate and distinct, my dear,” she admonished. “Never permit your learned husband’s genius to swallow up your Hartford good-sense.”

The Cavaliere was present when Alicia’s


letter came, and he asked his wife to read it aloud before him. Without a suspicion of its contents, Mary laughingly and willingly began to read, but her heart almost stilled with growing indignation and terror as she came to the more personal part of it. Her husband sat mutely absorbed in the American lady's estimate of him. There was a keen look in his dark eyes, and his broad forehead was slightly wrinkled.

"It sounds like a sermon," he said, when the end was reached. "I have been informed that the Americans are great preachers."

"It is only Alicia's clumsy way," she said, regretfully.

"Tell me," said he, suddenly, as if he had never seen her at all, "what sort of a person is she? How is she esteemed in her own country?"

"She is the best of creatures," answered



Mary, warmly, "and she has hosts of friends in America."

"How do you regard her tastes? Are they not as exaggerated as her person?"

It was a trying question. "I do not imagine," Mary slowly replied, "that you would find her faultless. She is fond of color and everything about her is too splendid to be—restful. Still it would not be an easy matter to point out any marked violation of the canons. I believe that her opinions are quoted,—in the city in which she lives. She seems to be a real social autocrat at home."

"Ah! I can well believe that from what I have learned concerning—that city," said the Cavaliere with a hard smile. "But what do you think of her opinions? Can they be trusted?"

"I must ask you to judge of that for yourself," replied his wife smilingly, "you certainly

had an opportunity of hearing her opinions, —enough of them to judge.”

“Yes ; and I found them very tiresome.”

Mary laughed softly. “Poor Alicia !” she said, “she found your society so profitable.”

“She is a most absurd and vulgar person,” he declared, nothing mollified. “It is impossible to tolerate such aggressive vulgarity.”

“I can see that she is absurd, but I do not see that she is vulgar,” said Mary, firmly.

“I consider her to be more vulgar than absurd,” said her husband severely, and with manifest irritation.

“She is as true as gold !” insisted Mary, stoutly.

The Cavaliere did not continue the discussion at the time. He picked up the book he had been reading, and at once gave it his earnest attention. An hour or so later, he sud-



denly closed the book and went over to the window where his wife sat at a small work-table. "Dearest signora," he began, resting his thin hand upon her smooth brown hair, "I am going to ask a favor of you."

With a distressing prescience of what was coming, she silently waited for him to proceed. All the color fled from her face, and his touch froze her like a chill.

"It will doubtless cost you something. It will probably give you pain," he continued, very softly.

"If it does, I shall prefer to do it. It will show you how willing I am to be led by your wisdom."

"You will say to yourself, 'He makes me suffer.'"

"I will not waste sympathy upon myself. I am too strong to need my own commiseration."

"Ah! you are right! Will you give her up,—your moon-faced friend?"

"Give her up!" she echoed mechanically, as if she had not heard aright.

"I mean Mrs. Talcote. Will you give her up—for my sake?"

Such an intense silence fell within the room that the expectant husband could hear the short, heavy throbs of his wife's disturbed heart. At last she turned her white, pained face up to his, and he saw a tear fall upon her cheek.

"Augusto," she said, in a voice almost helpless from grief, "I cannot believe that you realize how much you are asking of me."

"I knew it would give you pain. I warned you of that," he replied, with an unrelenting smile upon his sallow face.

"She has been so kind to me,—always. I



can remember scarcely any benefit or pleasure which has come to me without her unselfish contrivance. But for her, you and I would be strangers."

"I have not forgotten that."

"Does it not then make you a little less bitter against her?" she ventured, with a faint hope in her voice.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "It is not a question of bitterness," he said. "I find her vulgar, and I ask a favor of my wife."

"I will do whatever you command me," she said, with a weary sigh.


"I do not command you. I only request you."

"It is the same to me," she faltered.

He bowed his head and kissed her on the forehead. "You are a devoted wife," he said. "You are the ideal wife described by our

greatest moralist, the wise Bishop of St. Agatha of the Goths, St. Alphonsus Liguori."


She dropped her head upon the little table and no longer fought against the passion of grief which overwhelmed her. The whole structure of her own specious building had crumbled into dust at one blow. The light which her own enthusiasm had kindled went out in cruel darkness.



X.

The Cavaliere's Wife.

THE Cavaliere was making a great reputation for himself at the Ospedale, where he had already entered upon a supplemental course of experimentation, the outcome of which had attracted the attention of all the microscopists of Europe. The fame of his cleverness had given him a chair at Padova, and a goodly number of the great army of young men who affect foreign teaching were seen at his *cliniques*. Immediately after the holidays, he had received a Pontifical decoration, and it was whispered about among the well-informed, that the royal honor of the cross of St. Michael would be conferred upon him.



The Signora had shared his triumph at Padova, having accompanied him thither upon his promotion to the chair of Pathology in the University. They established themselves in a famous house near the Scuoli, where she continued her receptions.

One day in the early Spring, when the biting Helvetian winds were every day growing softer, and a rosy mass of apricot-bloom hung over the close-walled Padovan gardens, the Signora received a letter which set all her pulses throbbing. It came from Milan, and it was written by the Lady Teresa, of whom she had seen but little since she became her sister-in-law. Although it was written in English, its composition and sentiment were thoroughly Italian.


“I have already spent a fortnight”—wrote the beautiful Venetian—“at the Ospedale Maggiore of this city where your countryman,




Mr. Forester, is lying sick of a paludal fever. I do not know how nor when the hurtful miasm was absorbed—the physicians here are most learned and full of theories—I only realize that our friend is desperately stricken, and I do not know what else to do than to let you know it. I hear you saying, ‘Why is she with him?’ Bear with me, and I will tell you everything. I must begin with what has been told me since I came, for his delirium does not know me, nor that I am beside him. He has been in Milan most of the winter, and he has lodged with an English family in the Via Torino. They saw him passing the days in a strange, listless manner, with an always-tired look on his face, but they had no thought of anything serious, and ascribed his peculiar ways to his American fashion. He came and went without method and had few words for any person.

He never seemed to have acquaintances, nor did he ever read or write. After a long time the Englishwoman was troubled at his changed appearance and spoke of it to her husband. 'Let him alone,' he advised, 'he is doubtless an eccentric. It does not behoove us to be meddlesome.' But afterward, the husband grew anxious, and one day asked his lodger whether his health were failing him. Your friend laughed and replied, absently, 'I eat nothing, and I am very tired ; but I am not sick. I have no pain.' The next morning his host found him aflame with fever and wholly delirious.

"He fancied that he was left alone in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele and that the vehicles were continually passing over his body. Fearing infection, the prudent Englishman had him taken to the Ospedale, where he lies in a charmingly white chamber, with flowers



beside him and a skilful sister always at hand. The famous physicians of the Ospedale and a noted English surgeon, long resident here, are in daily consultation over him. I do not know what fate they have marked out for him. I have not asked them, 'Will he live or will he die?' But ah! I have not yet told you why I am at his bedside. Once, when they thought him not far from rational, they seized the moment to ask him if he had not some friend, some good friend who would come to him and bear a little of the responsibility of his case. 'Yes,' he replied to them, 'send to the Lady Josselyn in Venezia; her brother is a great physician.' Those were his words, and I am here. He has not yet known me. I go to him every day and look upon his haggard face. When the night comes and I go away to my hotel, I always say to myself, 'Shall I see him living to-morrow?'



I do not know what more to say but that I will send you news of everything."


With a stunned look and without a word of comment, the Cavaliere's wife handed Lady Josselyn's letter to her husband, who had come in while she was reading it. The Cavaliere read it through to the end and then contemptuously tossed it upon the table. "Poor Teresa," he said, with an unpleasant smile, "she is in love with your countryman."

The Signora's face grew scarlet in the twinkling of an eye.

"I do not believe it!" she declared.

"I hope it," said her husband calmly. "And while I am about it, I may as well be candid and confess that I hope that he will recover and marry her. It would be good fortune for her at last."

To this matter of pure speculation upon the part of her ambitious husband, the Signora



gave no heed; her troubled mind was intent upon another thought. "I think," she began hesitatingly, "I think I ought to go to Milan."

"Are you afraid that Teresa will neglect your countryman?" he asked.

"No," she answered, simply. "But he may ask for me."

"I cannot approve of your conjecture," he said, coldly. "I would not approve of your going to Milan,—for such a reason."

"I cannot tell, now," she replied rather irrelevantly. "I do not know. I must think it over."

The Cavaliere went back to his object-glasses with a shadowy look upon his disdainful face.

The next day brought another bulletin from Lady Teresa. "All is unchanged—" she wrote—"he does not move and always mutters in a wearied tone. The great English surgeon


came to-day with the other physicians, and I tried in my poor way to read their learned faces ; but I saw nothing beyond the gravity which has been there from the first."

"Did I not predict wisely," said the Cavaliere, when he had read it, "when I said that Teresa would keep a perfect watch beside her friend? Do you not see how unnecessary it is for you to go to Milan? He has no need of you."

"I do not know, now," she answered. "I am thinking."

At last the summons came. "He will not live. He has called for you."


The Cavaliere was at the Scuoli. The Signora quickly gathered together a few of the necessities of a journey and put them into a traveling-bag. Then she dressed herself in a plain gray suit and sat down to think a little longer. It was not far from mid-day, and she



knew that the leisurely-going express train between Venice and Verona would not reach Padova before the middle of the afternoon. She had plenty of time to think, but, after all, she could not think much. Her heart was sick with a horrible dread, and her soul was bitter and crushed with a feeling akin to homesickness. And there was still another emotion timidly knocking at the door of her aching heart which she dared not recognize. But she could not stifle it. What was this man to her—this man who lay dying in Milan in the arms of the beautiful woman who loved him?

She heard a well-known, stealthy footstep on the stair, and, a moment later, the Cavaliere came into the room. His quick eye took in the entire situation at a glance. In a moment his cadaverous face grew as gray as ashes.

“Have you, then, finished your thinking?”



he asked, in a tone which was the refinement of bitterness.

"Yes," she answered him, so calmly that she wondered at it. "I am going to act."

She did not once take her eyes from his bloodless face. She could see his muscles twitch, and she felt that he was using all his strength to gain the mastery over himself.

"Do you not pity me?" he said, in a thick, unnatural voice, with a nervous tremor upon his lips. "My wife has undeceived me."

She did not answer him a word. She only put her hand upon her heart, as if she wished to still its discordant beating.

"It is not right for you to go to Milan. It is not proper," he exclaimed, violently and painfully.

"The Lady Teresa is there," she said.


"Teresa is not proper. Teresa is constantly

violating propriety. She can never be a model for my wife. Besides, she loves him."

At this, the Signora rose from her seat and came a little closer to her husband. There was an eager light in her eyes, and her voice was buoyed up with a sudden hopeful impulse.

"Augusto," she said. "I am going to ask you a question which I had forgotten until the day when you asked me to give up my oldest friend, Alicia Talcote. Through all the winter it has kept coming into mind and I have as often exorcised it—like a vile thing—with a prayer. I can keep it within myself no longer; I must ask you. Did you use base means to rid yourself and your family of the Ravennese Marchese, your sister's lover?"

Her tall, girlish figure rose up to its fullest height, and her pale, earnest face held close to his lips was a silent demand for the truth.



"Has Teresa talked to you of the Marchese?" he asked, in a voice which did not indicate the ordeal through which he was passing.

"Yes; she told me before you married me. She warned me, and she bade me ask you if she had told me the truth,"

"What did you say to her?"

"I did not believe her. I said that what she told me was not true."

Her husband waited a moment, as if he were deliberating between the easy deceit he could so well command and the honest nakedness of truth.

"Did you tell her that she lied?"

"Yes; it was the same," she said, covering her face with her hands.

"Then you owe her an apology. She spoke the truth."

"Then I will go to Milan," she said, very



quietly and decidedly. "I will make my peace with Lady Teresa as quickly as I can."

A sinister look swept over the Cavaliere's distorted face. "*Signora mia*," he muttered between his set teeth, "you do not seem to have profited by the moral teaching of our great Liguori."

"I know nothing of it," she replied. "I am an American."

"Ah! it is not taught in your country. According to its canons a husband may restrain his wife—by force, if it be necessary; and he may judge of the need for such extremity."

"It is a relic of the dark ages," she said.


"Nevertheless it obtains here in full force. It is by no means obsolete in Italy," he declared.

She did not offer any further argument ;

she waited in mute wonder at what his course would be.

He came closer to her and took her head between his hands and held her face uplifted into his own. "*Carissima*," he said, more tenderly than she had ever heard him speak, "I can trust you; I am going back to my *clinique*; when I return I shall find my wife here,—I am sure of it!" So saying, he kissed her upon the lips and went quietly out of her presence.

She stood a long time where he had left her, with her hand upon her lips, where his kiss still burned like a living fire. A clock in the hall outside struck three, and she suddenly realized that there remained only time enough for her to reach the station before the Verona express would be due. She hastily put on her hat and veil, took the bag in her hand, and left the house. A student and a



market-woman who passed her on the way, bowed low and wondered a little at the plain appearance of the learned professor's wife, who was doubtless going on a journey.

All the sunny afternoon the train crept along through the level plains of fruitful Lombardy, shut in by their misty, blue-topped mountain wall. The air was warm and sweet with an exhilarating freshness, and the early green of mulberry trees gleamed brightly in the yellow rays. It was almost night when the train crept slowly around the bristling walls of stately Verona. The fiercely-moustached guard peered sharply into the face of the shrinking woman who was going on to Milan, and shut the carriage-door with a slam. The sun had set low down behind the Guarda Lake, but its cold, steel-blue water was bright with twinkling caps.

When the dreary, wakeful hours had pain-

fully dragged themselves along, stiffened with cold and fatigue, and worn with suspense and dread, she entered Milan, just as the day was breaking.

XI.

At the Ospedale Maggiore.

THE Ospedale Maggiore of Milan is said to be the largest institution in Europe devoted to its purposes. It enjoys a great celebrity not only from the fact that its staff of visiting physicians is composed of men who are the most advanced in their profession, but also on account of the wonderful terra-cotta work upon its façade.

The Cavaliere's wife stood before its great closed gates in the early dawning of a cloudless day. The sleepy, red-eyed *cocchiere*, whose wretched vehicle had brought her from the station, warned her, as he set her down, that she could by no means enter

the hospital before the regular hour for opening, which was nine o'clock. But she gave no heed to his admonition and, having given him his fee and gratuity, dismissed him. So, in obedience to her command, he had left her alone before the closely-barred outer gate.

She looked up at the great, still pile before her, and, for a moment, her heart grew sick, and her determination seemed impracticable to her. A new terror of the undertaking fell upon her like a deadly weight. The light grew obscure, and the massive oaken gate danced up and down before her unsteady sight.

With desperate activity she reached up and rang. She could hear a series of reverberating echoes rushing back through the long corridors. After waiting, as it seemed to her, an interminable length of time without a sign of any response, she gathered all her

strength and rang again. Presently there was a rattling of chains and a slipping of bolts. A little wicket-door in the wall above her head flew open, and somebody called out, in a vexed tone : "What can you want at this unheard-of hour?"

"I want to enter the hospital," she replied, faintly. "My friend is dying here."

"It is impossible! It is even absurd!" declared the voice over her head. "You must come here at a reasonable hour." And the wicket-door was closed.

Just then the great hospital-clock struck the hour. Four terrible hours of waiting! She groaned and almost sank to the earth in despair. Then the little door was again opened, and the voice sleepily drawled out :

"Are you there still?"

Made strong by sudden hope, she almost shouted :

“Yes ; I am here ! ”

“Have you an order for admission,—a permit from the Chief of Staff ? ”

“Yes,” she answered stoutly, with no thought of any deception, only a forlorn necessity of doing what she must.—“I am expected here.”

“Enter then,” said the voice. And the huge door swung back upon its hinges. She quickly stepped across the undefended threshold and almost flew over the marble floor, as if she feared some cruel chance might thrust her outside the walls. She saw no sign of any person who might either direct or interrupt her progress. She kept straight on, until she came out into the beautifully-kept inner court. Here there were groups of flowering plants, and a wealth of early blossoms, nurtured with the tenderest care, made the whole place fragrant.

As she stood perplexed, not knowing which way to turn or where to go, she heard a light footstep on the pavement beside her, and a softly-modulated voice, a woman's voice, addressed her.

"Has the Signora need of me?"

She turned quickly about with a startled look upon her weary face. She saw a small, plain-faced woman who wore the beautiful, white woolen habit of the order of St. Dominic.

"My sister," she replied, pitifully, holding out her hands, "I have come to see a dying man. He is an American, and I am his friend."

"I know," said the sweet-voiced Dominican. "It is the Signor Americano, and you are his friend. Come with me."

She followed the noiselessly-stepping nun through a labyrinth of corridors, up broad

stairs, in and out of shadowed passages, around many curious turns, past the open doors of wards filled with sleeping men and women, until they reached that part of the gigantic structure which is devoted to patients of the better class. They stopped before a closed door, and the nun—in the cautious manner of a *religieuse*—put her ear close down to it and listened a moment. Then she carefully opened it and stood a little aside for Mary to enter. The trembling woman took a step within the room, and the door was softly closed behind her.

It was a plain little chamber, quite spotless, with a high ceiling and a shining waxed floor. There were two deep windows in it, and one of them, around which a purple wistaria-vine clambered, was open. Two or three devotional prints hung upon the walls, and a small table, covered with a white cloth, stood under-

neath a black wooden crucifix. A slender iron bedstead was drawn a little way out from the wall, and under its snowy coverings, the indistinct outline of a motionless form was visible. A white-robed Dominican nun sat close by the bedside, in an attitude of intense watchfulness. She did not even raise her obedient eyes from the quiet bed as Mary came into the room. A tiny, dart-like bit of sunshine stole in between the vines and played like a living thing upon the polished floor.

Mary stood motionless in the spot where her guide had left her. She felt as if she had forgotten how to move. There was a sense of utter loss within her,—the pitiful helplessness of a great sorrow. The occasion was far too intense for embarrassment ; but she felt half lost to consciousness. She gazed upon her surroundings as if she did not know them

to be real. At that dreadful moment she did not feel certain of her own identity.

She was roused from her painful uncertainty by the gentle touch of the Dominican's hand. "My child," she whispered, "sit beside me and wait a little." There was no sign of surprise, nor questioning in her placid face. There was nothing in her toneless voice to indicate that she had not expected the arrival of a stranger.

"Is he sleeping?" asked Mary, with a look of awful expectation on her face.

"Yes; he is sleeping," answered the nun, in her fathomless voice.


"Will he wake again,—here?"

"Signora, yes; God willing."


With the fascination of her deathly suspense broken, Mary sat down upon a chair beside the other woman and waited.

Waited. Waited, so long it seemed to her

that it might have been an eternity of whose beginning she no longer had any remembrance. The amber dart of sunshine grew broader and more restive. Once it danced upon the bed and quivered for a moment upon the spot where the quiet sleeper's head was laid. Then the nun arose and walked on tip-toe to the window and carefully closed the shutter, after which she stole softly back again and began another decade of the long rosary which hung from her waist. Everything in the scrupulously kept room grew familiar under the strange, enforced inspection to which Mary's weary eyes powerlessly lent themselves. She recognized the little black-framed print which hung above the sleeper's head, to be a copy of that angel-encircled Virgin, whom Titian glorified in the greatest of all paintings. In another, she could see the martyred youth, Sebastian, with agonized, enraptured eyes already fixed upon the Paradise they discover.



The early morning wore away. There was a rumble of carts in the roughly-paved street below. The shrill voices of market-women and the long-drawn cries of street-vendors came up from the open squares. There were, also, signs of an aroused activity in the great institution itself. Now and then echoes of shuffling footsteps were borne through the corridors, and the click of locks and the dull creaking of hinges foretold the beginning of another day of rampant pain and restful convalescence within the massive walls. At last a firm, rapid step, about which there was no effort at concealment, was heard advancing. The door was thrown open, and a man, short and robust, with a dark beard, entered the room. He put his hat upon the little table, and with a quick look at the waiting women, walked rapidly to the bedside and laid his hand upon the sleeper's head.



"It is the great physician, the Cavaliere Namias," whispered the nun, with an air of unbounded respect for the name.

The famous physician turned about and made a sign to the Dominican which she apparently understood ; for she left her seat and opened one of the shutters so that the morning sun streamed in upon the bed in a dazzling flood. The man put aside the covering and peered intently into the pale, worn face below him. Then he reached down and put one of his hands upon a wasted wrist and began to feel about. A moment after, his skilled ear was resting upon the sunken chest of his patient.

After a few breathless moments, he came over and stood before the woman and in a deep, naturally-pitched voice, began a series of questionings of the Dominican—after the manner of his profession.

"Has he slept ever since I last saw him?"


"Yes, Cavaliere," answered the nun, who had risen and was standing before him with downcast eyes. "He has not once moved since midnight."

"Have you offered him anything,—stimulant or nourishment?"

"Nothing whatever, not even medicine. The Cavaliere's order not to disturb him has been literally obeyed."

"I am certain of that," said the great man, approvingly. Then he turned his keen eyes upon Mary, who had not stirred in her seat, so intently had she listened. He looked her over from head to foot and turned again to the sister with a questioning glance, which she did not fail to comprehend. "It is the Signora," she explained, "of whom the Lady Josselyn spoke."

"You are very wise to have come so



quickly," he said, speaking in English, with an accent which was evidently German. And he shook hands with her with an air of highly distinguished appreciation.

"How do you find your patient?" she asked with sudden courage.

"Our patient is—so-so," he replied, with a non-committal shrug of his broad shoulders. "He is sleeping you observe. It is a new experience for him to sleep so calmly."

"Is it from exhaustion?" ventured Mary.

"Not altogether. It is partially induced by a mixture containing chloral hydrate and cannabis Indica."

"Chloral, I know about. I do not know the other," she said mechanically.

"It is Indian hemp," he laconically explained. "He will presently wake, and you may speak to him."

"Will he live, or will he die?" she demanded,

so calmly that the man at once gave up the idea that she was closely akin to his patient.

"It is of consequence for Madame to know?"

"Yes ; it is of great consequence to me."


"Then I must tell you truly, and when he rouses and speaks to you—if it is necessary—if you choose to do it—you may tell him. He will not live."

"I thank you," she said.

The physician bowed and turned again to the Dominican, to whom he gave some clearly explicit directions. Then he took his hat and left the room.

The sister gave a little careful sigh and whispered : "He is very great, and as good as he is skilful."


At the close of another hour of waiting and watching, the deeply-narcotized sleeper



began to show some sign of awakening. At first it was only a trifling movement of the head, so slight, indeed, that the keen-eyed sister did not see it. Then a fleshless hand was slowly moved a little way out from underneath the covering, and a sound like a weakened moan, came from the sleeper. The nun quickly rose, poured a few drops of some liquid from a tiny vial upon a sponge, and tenderly moistened the parched lips. Mary came over and stood trembling beside the bed, and, for the first time, looked upon the shattered ruin of the once vigorous frame of her old friend.

Then it was that a great wave of pity and tenderness swept over her heart, and an intense longing for everything she had put away from her took possession of her soul.

Suddenly, as if her late-found longing had provoked some answer in the life which had




almost fled, the sick man opened his eyes and fixed them upon her full of recognition. She saw his lips move, as if he were trying to articulate but had forgotten the mechanism of speech. She put her face down close to his and heard him whisper,—“ Mary, I love you ! ”

“ Yes, John ; I know. I love you, too, ” she said, as soothingly as if she were making her peace with a grieved child. Then she kissed his lips.

A smile—almost as faint as a smile could well be—came into his sunken features ; then he closed his eyes again and fell asleep.

She stood for a long while and watched him, with a face as colorless as his own ; but there was something upon it which told of a joy too real for Death to deprive her of—a something which would be forever hers.

With a long and earnest look she turned



away, sadly enough, yet bearing within herself the new-born comfort which had come to her.

In the courtyard, she met Lady Josselyn, face to face. Lady Teresa threw her arms about her and burst into a passion of tears. Her beautiful face was swollen with much weeping, and her wonderful eyes were dull with sleeplessness.

"I believed that you would come," she sobbed. "But I did not hope to see you so soon. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, Teresa," said Mary, quietly. "I have taken my leave of him, and I am going back to Padova."

"Is he then—dead?" gasped Lady Teresa, with horror in her face.

"No; he is sleeping. But he will soon die, I think."

A curious expression, half awe, half wonder,

mingled with a great admiration, stood out upon the fair Venetian's face.

"An Italian woman would remain until the last," she said.

"But I am not Italian, you know."

"I understand you, dear," said Lady Teresa, "and my love and respect for you are unbounded."

"Teresa, I have wronged you bitterly. I cannot go back to Padova until I have uncovered my shame before you. I put your question to my husband, and he told me the truth. Can you ever forgive me?"


The impulsive Venetian once more burst into a fit of violent weeping. She clasped her sister-in-law to her throbbing heart, as if she would not let her go, and kept sobbing: "God bless you, dear! God help you!"

This was the forgiveness that her vain, warm heart poured out at the penitent feet

of her brother's wife,—the wife who was hurrying back to Padova.

* * * * *

John Forester did not die. His life long hung upon a thread, which in spite of the gloomy prognosis of skill, was not broken. Long before his tedious convalescence was ended, the Lady Teresa went back to the dull little house beside the Canonry. Forester crossed the sea.



Finally.

ONE day last summer a gentleman sat upon a wooden bench, in the open Plaza of the oldest city in the United States. The mail had just arrived, and he held some unopened letters and newspapers in his hand ; but he seemed to be in no haste to examine them. The well-trained band of a negro regiment was playing a popular composition, and he was listening to it and at the same time watching the curious throng that swarmed in the Plaza. There were several officers in the somewhat tame uniform of the U. S. A. and some fashionably-dressed ladies who were evidently the wives of officers. Better still, a number of fresh-looking children, some of them attended by meek private soldiers,

and others, borne in the swarthy arms of native women, made themselves as active and interesting as children always are. At a distant corner,—just outside the Plaza proper—a group of Navajos, wrapped in scarlet blankets, stood as motionless as statues.

Presently the musical number was completed, and the excellent musicians put down their brasses. Some of them, with the gallantry for which the race is noted, went over to the rows of shawl-enveloped maidens and resumed the social passages which the leader's call had interrupted. The commissioned officers made little informal calls upon the charming wives and sisters of their companions-in-arms. The non-commissioned, private nurses ran about the Square with the beautifully-dressed children upon their broad shoulders.

The rather distinguished-looking gentleman

now examined his letters. He evidently found them unimportant, for he soon put them into the inner pocket of his coat and gave his attention to the newspapers. One of them was much soiled, and seemed to have been upon a long journey and to have passed through many hands. Whatever secret there was about it was disclosed by a scrawled word, written with a pencil upon the margin. It was "Alicia." The newspaper was a sorry affair and was printed in Italian,—a language which the gentleman did not perfectly understand,—for he showed great deliberation in reading it. It was a Venetian daily journal, small, badly printed, with every column flanked by lines of mourning, which were far too wide for the size of the sheet. The gentleman labored away at a highly characteristic account of how upon that lovely May morning, the news had fallen like a

thunderbolt upon the waking city, that the Saviour of United Italy, the Hero of two continents, had breathed out his life at Caprera; how every patriotic merchant had sadly put up his window-shutters and inscribed upon them the pathetic chalkmarks, *Lutto nazionale*; how, all the civic societies and fraternities had sent wreaths and addresses to humble Caprera; there had been a procession also,—a long one, reaching from the Public Garden to the Piazza; the Free Masons had taken part in the ceremony, and, although it was the great feast of Corpus Christi, not an ecclesiastic could have been found abroad, so inimical—so the paper declared—is the Church to Progress, and so indifferent to Popular Opinion.

The superior band played another well-adapted arrangement. The gentleman still worked away at his translation. When he

had finished the florid description of the ceremonies, and had even deciphered a few words of one of the bombastic addresses which were made upon the occasion, his attention was all at once attracted to a name that he saw in an obscure corner, into which the story of the nation's grief had crowded it.

It was the announcement of the death of the Cavaliere Ferro, late consulting physician to their Majesties, the King and Queen of Italy.

* * * * *

A fortnight later, the Talcotes sat at the informal early breakfast which was Alicia's latest Arcadian fancy. She was going over the day's newspapers at a galloping rate, and the Judge looked sleepily good-natured. When she had made an end of the journals, she pushed them all away from her with a pretty show of annoyance.

"It isn't there!" she declared. The Judge

looked at her with the mild interest which might justly be expected from a fond and dutiful husband.

"Your friend's name is not to be found in any list of out-going passengers," she said, with something very like indignation in her voice.

"My friend,—my friend's name——" repeated the Judge in amazement. "Do you mean, Forester? Is he going abroad?"

His wife gave a little shrug of contempt. "It is almost too much to expect of him," she said.

"I should say he'd had enough of it," the Judge continued, with dry stupidity.

Alicia gave him a gently pitying look. "My dear," she said, very softly, "there's a certain charm about it after all. You forget how interested he was in—in Palladio and Architecture."

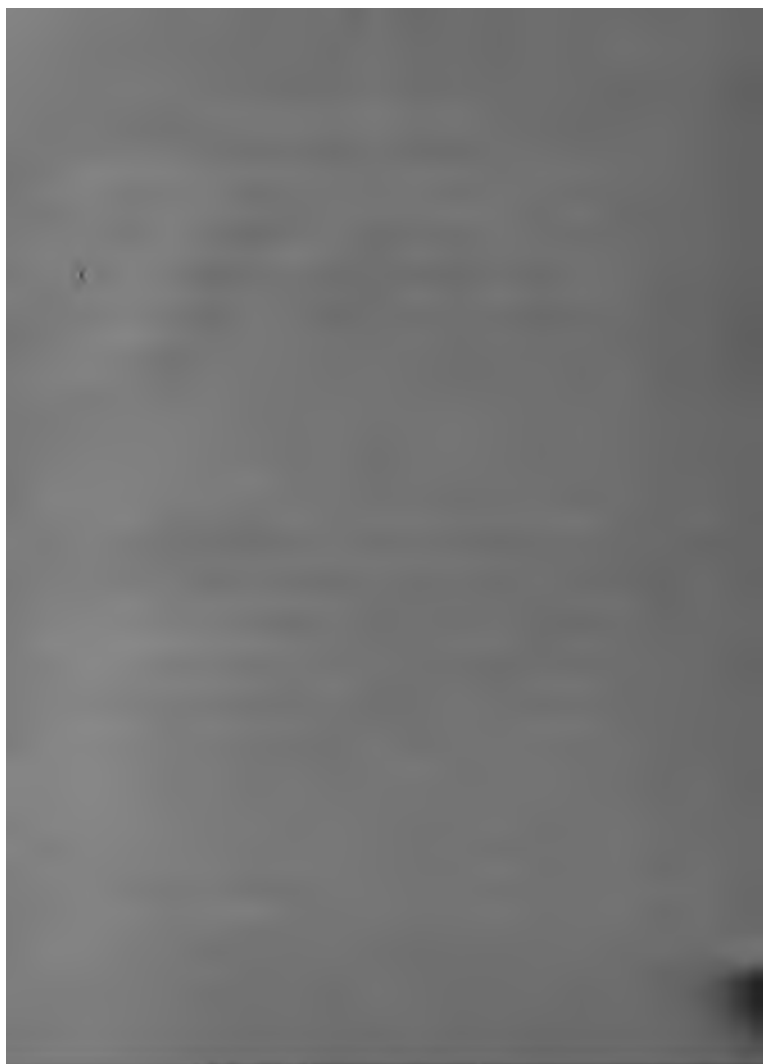
But all this time the Judge was inwardly convulsed with a paroxysm of his hidden sort of hilarity; for he knew that in spite of his wife's diligence, his friend was that moment standing where the vast arch of stillest blue dips down into the gray sea, hiding away all earthly things save one face which even the darkness of a starless night could not shut out from his patient, happy eyes.



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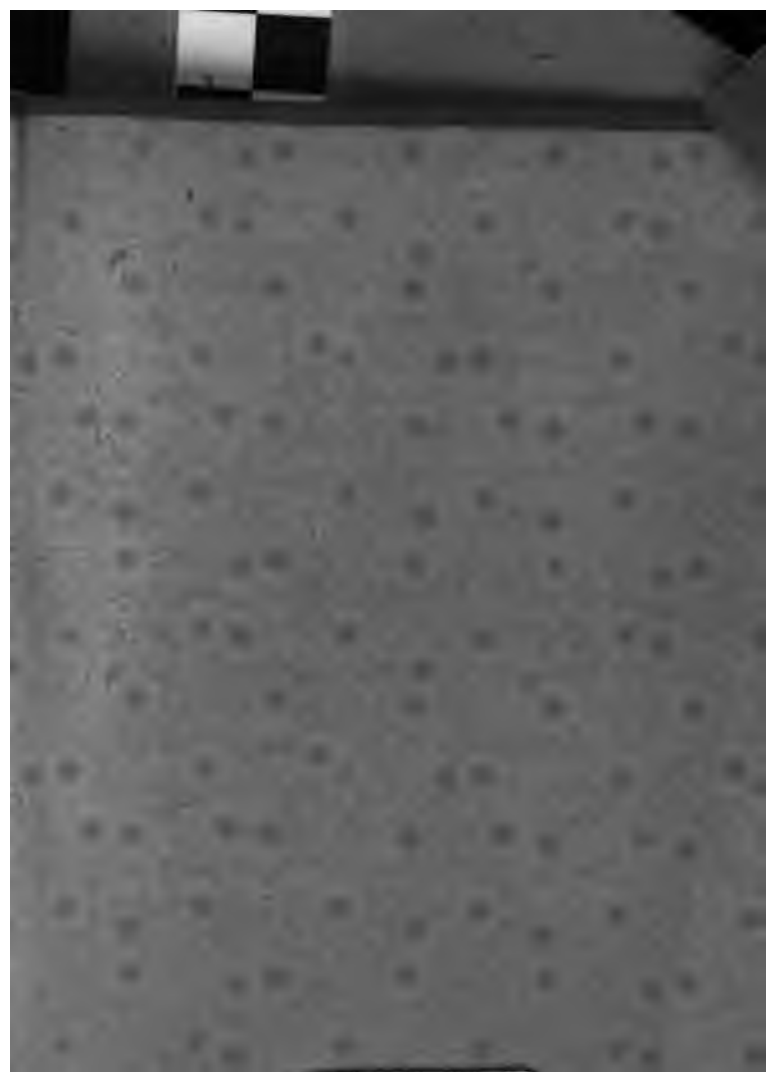
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